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**FOUR ROADS TO
PARADISE**

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“GIVE YOU BACK MY MYSTERIOUS LETTER? OH, IMPOSSIBLE!”

FOUR ROADS TO PARADISE

BY

MAUD WILDER GOODWIN

Author of "Sir Christopher," "Flint," "White
Aprons," "The Head of a Hundred," etc.

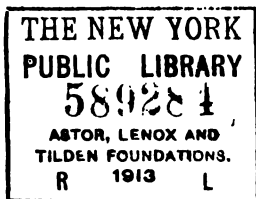
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
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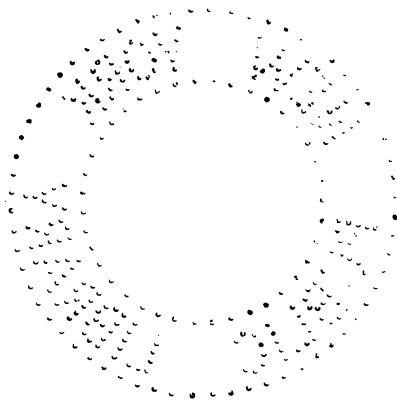
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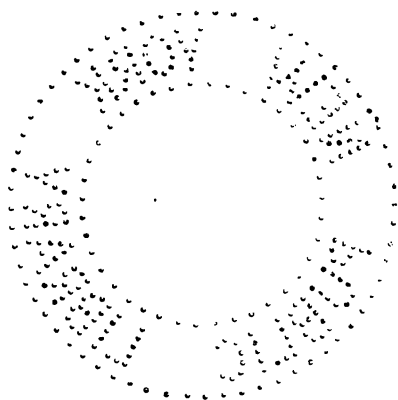
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**FOUR ROADS TO
PARADISE**

PROLOGUE

"Four men," says the Talmud, "entered paradise: one beheld and died, one lost his senses, one destroyed the young plants, one only entered in peace."

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FOUR ROADS TO PARADISE

I

A MODERN KNIGHT OF THE GRAIL

“The way is long, my children, long and rough,
The moors are dreary, and the woods are dark ;
But he that creeps from cradle on to grave,
Unskilled save in the velvet course of fortune,
Hath missed the discipline of noble hearts.”

“**A** GENTLEMAN to see me ? *A gentleman,*
did you say, Parkins ?”

“Y-yes, sir. That is, he looked to be—one
of the clergy, I think, sir.”

“Did he give you his name ?”

“No, sir. He said you 'd not know him.”

“Show him up.”

The black-beetle butler closed the door, and the Bishop reluctantly pushed aside a pile of manuscript on which he had been working. It was irritating to be interrupted at the climax of a peroration ; but the thread of continuance once

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broken, there was no use in resuming work till the interruption was disposed of finally. Therefore the Bishop deliberately uncoiled his attention. First he fixed his eyes upon the ring on his finger, then he took a leisurely look up and down the avenue which ran before his window as straight and uninteresting as a strip of tape. Finally he turned his gaze on the flame of gas which leaped and fluttered from the artificial log in the fireplace. It was seldom that he allowed himself to look at that log, which was an offense to his esthetic eye, and was tolerated only for its unquestioned convenience.

Bishop Alston's mien and bearing suggested not so much the army of the Lord as His diplomatic service. Nature and time had drawn their tonsure round the Bishop's crown, and a silver fringe fell over his forehead. The eyes beneath looked out small and gray from between narrowed eyelids; but their sharpness was mitigated by benevolent crow's-feet at the corners of the lids. The ears, bent slightly forward, were adapted to catching secrets, and the close-shut mouth to keeping guard over them. The figure was wide at the waist, to the point of straining the waistcoat buttons, and told of one not unfamiliar with flesh-pots.

“Come in!”

A KNIGHT OF THE GRAIL 5

This in answer to a second knock, for the Bishop's thoughts had wandered too far afield to respond to the first summons from the outer world.

In answer to the call, Parkins ushered in a young man who stood crushing his soft hat nervously, evidently hesitating on the threshold, in spite of the invitation to enter.

The Bishop rose, looked at the newcomer from over his gold-bowed spectacles, and repeated :

“Come in, Mr.—?”

“Walford — Stuart Walford.”

There was a slight pause in which the Bishop strove to classify the name in order to fit it with social urbanity or episcopal benevolence. Evidently he decided on the latter, for there was a jingle of Peter's keys in his voice as he responded :

“And how can I be of service to you?”

“By your counsel, Bishop. I have no personal claim to urge as an excuse for taking up your valuable time; but my grandfather, Archibald Stuart—” Here he drew out a note of introduction, which Bishop Alston took to the window and read.

“Ah!” murmured the Bishop, adding a shade of warmth to his manner as he felt the social clue

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drop into his fingers. "So Archibald Stuart is your grandfather! We were boys together in the Old Dominion. I knew him well, and liked him as well as I knew him; but in some way we managed to lose each other: people are so easily lost here at the West — a dip in the prairie, and they are gone from sight for years. Archie Stuart a grandfather! How time flies! But reminiscence makes us old fellows tedious. Your grandfather's name is a talisman. Let me ask you again how I can serve you, and of what counsel you stand in need."

"I wish to consult you about a course of action that I have set my heart on."

"Is it advice or approval that you wish?"

The youth winced, and the Bishop noted it.

"Pardon me, Mr. er-er — Mr. Walford—"

Bishop Alston spoke with that hesitating "er" which Providence bestows on dignitaries to enable them to deliberate without a full stop: "Pardon me, but we shall get on faster if you tell me quite frankly at the outset whether you have definitely resolved to carry out this course of which you speak, or whether you really intend to be swayed by my possible disapproval."

"I think it is your consecration more than your approval I am seeking." Unconsciously the young man fingered a black cross hanging

above the clerical waistcoat. "I desire," he rushed on breathlessly, "to dedicate my life to the service of the lepers at Molokai. Damien is dead. There is need of more workers like him."

"Yes," said the Bishop, with barely perceptible emphasis, "more workers like *him*."

"But why should not the Anglican Church send forth men as brave as he—as willing to renounce self and follow the cross?"

"Self-love," said the Bishop, "has many forms. One of them is altruism."

Walford bit his lip.

"Oh," he cried impatiently, "do not trifle with me! It may be that I am unworthy; but go I must. By day and by night I can see nothing but those poor wretches, dying there by inches, shut in by a precipice on one side and the sea on the other. In a beautiful spot? Yes, but what, in God's name, can that matter to them, cooped up, driven from all human companionship, forgotten by their friends, living in a dull loathing of one another! Would it not be a glorious mission to carry even a gleam of light and hope to these outcasts, and, if one must die a leper, to die a martyr too, and a martyr to such a cause?"

The Bishop answered nothing. He was not following Walford's impassioned plea very closely. The words of the old proph^e rose to his mind:

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“Weep ye not for the dead . . . : but weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.”

Inadvertently his thought found its way to his lips:

“What a sacrifice!”

“A sacrifice? Yes; but one I am willing, yes, eager, to make. I have counted the cost.”

“Where is your home?” was the Bishop’s somewhat unexpected question.

“In Alkali.”

“You have always lived there?”

“No; I was born at Painted Rock, Arizona, near the Gila River and the Maricopa Divide.”

“You have traveled?”

“Twice a year from Alkali to Tucson, and of course back and forth from the seminary.”

If the Bishop smiled it was imperceptible—a mere twitching of the muscles about the mouth, instantly suppressed.

“You know nothing of Europe, then—have never seen either Paris or London, eh?”

“Never.”

“Nor even New York?”

“Nor even New York.”

“Then—pardon me, but you have *not* counted the cost. You are willing to give up a life which you have never lived, that is, never tasted in its

plenitude and power. You have lived among your inferiors. I am not a clairvoyant, but I can read your face, and I know the town where you live. All your spiritual nourishment is drawn from books. Of men, men as good as you morally, better than you intellectually, you know nothing."

"Do I need to know more than Jesus Christ, and Him crucified?"

Walford's eye kindled as though some presence were palpable before him.

The Bishop temporized.

"Archie Stuart's grandson!" he exclaimed, as if memory had drifted in like a fog, obscuring the present crisis.

The visitor tapped on the under side of the chair with restless finger-ends. At last he burst out afresh: "I am ready to give myself wholly, utterly to the Master's service. Can I do more?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By having more to give."

"I — I don't think I understand you."

"Perhaps not. What I mean is this: You owe it to God to be first of all as much of a man as it lies in you to be, and after that to consecrate your full powers to the highest good as you see the highest good. You can-

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not tell — no man of twenty-five or less can tell where his mission lies, and many bring discredit on the Master's service by setting themselves tasks beyond their strength, and failing ignominiously where they might have carried through a smaller undertaking, if they had but gaged their powers rightly."

"Ah, it is my strength you doubt!"

"Pardon me again," answered the Bishop, in his gentle, first-aid-to-the-injured manner. "I know you so little I can in no wise estimate you individually; but I have known many young men of about your age, and never one whom I thought justified in making a momentous decision by which his whole after life must be bound."

"Yet young men marry."

"Yes, more 's the pity — too young, most of them. But, after all, that falls in with nature's plan. You are working at cross-purposes with nature. Oh, I do not forget the noble army of martyrs, and St. Sebastian, with his boy's body pierced and bleeding. You would face martyrdom stanchly — I read that in your eye; but what you purpose is something far harder — a renunciation of life and all that makes it worth while, not once for all, to awake in bliss to everlasting rewards, but day after day shut off from all the dear, familiar sights and sounds."

“Yet He has promised to be with those who go forth in His name —”

The Bishop looked keenly at the flushed cheek, and the broad brow from which the hair had been shaken in an impatient tangle. Twice he half stretched out the fingers of benediction; then he drew them back and laid his hand on a letter, the second in a pile at the end of his desk.

“Come,” he said in his gentlest tones, “you know the Knights of the Grail served their novitiate before they were found worthy of the sacred quest. Now I ask of you a like period of probation. I have here a letter from a rector, a friend of mine at the East. He fills the pulpit of St. Simeon Stylites in New York, and he writes that he is overworked and is seeking an assistant. He wants a Western man, a man conspicuous in energy and organizing power, and asks if I can suggest any one. He speaks of haste. Here is your opportunity — will you go?”

The Bishop turned the ring on his finger as if, like Solomon's, it could compel the truth from him whose eyes fell upon it.

The young man stared first at the ring absently, then at the wearer keenly. He too was weighing motives.

“I will go,” he said; “but first will you accept my vows?”

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“No, no; you are neither strong enough nor weak enough for vows. Make what resolutions you choose.”

“Resolutions! Ah, those *are* weak!”

“Only when they are weakly made. If hell is paved with resolutions, heaven is vaulted with them.” This sentiment struck the Bishop as rather good, and while he was uttering it he determined to use it in his sermon. It might prove worth the interruption. “If,” he continued, “at the end of eighteen months you are sure of yourself, come back, and I will receive your vows. More than that — I will help you forward on the glorious path which you have chosen.”

Walford looked his gratitude. He could not trust himself to speak.

“Let me see,” said the Bishop. “This is November; how soon could you make your arrangements to start for New York?”

“To-morrow.”

“Good! I like promptness. And have you any money for the journey?”

“I have enough for everything.”

“Good again!”

The Bishop had a dawning fear that he might have rushed into too impulsive a confidence in this fiery young disciple. The sense of financial backing gave solidity to aspiration.

Walford rose.

"Sit down!" his superior commanded, as he drew out a sheet of note-paper.

"I am writing a letter of introduction," he explained cordially. "I would rather have you make your impression on Dr. Milner personally than through correspondence. If he appoints you, you will secure the rare privilege of living and working for a year or more by the side of a man who shows forth the beauty of holiness not only with his lips but in his life."

While the Bishop wrote, the young man looked about him with interest rather than approval. To the soul keyed to sacrifice, luxury is childishness, and Walford experienced a vague scorn of the soft blend of Persian rugs and tapestried walls. What right had men with baubles such as these when their fellows were suffering, agonizing, dying? Yet unconsciously his starved esthetic sense was being fed, and he found himself rested and refreshed.

Hitherto his sense of the beautiful had found vent in the enjoyment of nature alone. It had appeared to him a matter of course that the indoor world should be full of hideous shapes and crude colors. It seemed almost immoral that they should be otherwise; yet here—he rose and walked to the book-shelves.

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"Ah," exclaimed the Bishop, with more enthusiasm than he had yet shown, "you are looking at my books, eh?" And rising, he, too, crossed the room to the shelves and drew out a volume bound in blue levant. "Baxter's 'Saint's Rest,'" he explained, "bound by Rivière, and one of my treasures. See the delicacy of that tooling on the inner edge — alternate crosses and crowns —"

"Very appropriate," Walford assented; but the subject had little interest for him, and he swiftly reverted to his old hostile attitude of mind — the protest of ethics against esthetics, a struggle nineteen hundred years old.

The Bishop was quick to feel the indifference of the younger man's manner. His books were his children, and he was hypersensitive as to the treatment which they received. He turned to the table, hastily blotted and folded his note, and handed it to Walford, who perceived at once that the interview was ended.

"One thing more," the Bishop said. "I advise you for these coming eighteen months to put Molokai and its lepers wholly out of your mind. Look at them as if they were the last of your life, and resolve to live them to the full. At the end of the time we have set, come back if you will, and then — then we 'll talk of the future."

Bishop Alston, accompanying Walford to the

door, laid his hands with kindly emphasis upon the youthful shoulders.

“Don’t think,” he said, “that I fail to sympathize with your hopes and aims! It is a great work that you have in view,— a noble work,— and I honor you from my heart for your purpose.”

Walford bowed in silence, and the door closed after his retreating footsteps. The Bishop mused for some time with bent head, his elbows resting on the table, and his delicate fingers running through the thin fringe of silver hair.

He pulled toward him the half-finished sermon which had been thrust aside at the stranger’s entrance and strove to pick up again the thread of his discourse; but it would not do. A real life-problem had come between him and the academic argument, and he could not get rid of its bulk and the shadow that it cast.

He acknowledged to himself that he had gone beyond his warrant in advising this young man on such short acquaintance. Would it not have been better, more in keeping with his office, to have received Walford’s vows, to have encircled him with strengthening influences, to have sent him on his sacred errand of help and mercy, and followed him with blessing?

“No,” said the Bishop, finally, aloud, as was

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often his wont in talking with himself; "he must prove all things before he can have strength to hold fast that which is good. I think I will write to Anne about him. He has never known a woman like her. What will he think of Anne, I wonder? Will he ever come back?"

The Bishop meditated for a long time with folded arms and bent head. Then he drew out a fresh tablet of paper, and, after consulting his Testament, wrote at the head of the page:

"And he bearing his cross went forth (John xix. 17)."

Having written the text, he returned the paper to his drawer and turned the key. "There," he said; "some day I will write a sermon from that text—some day when I know what this man does with his life. Archie Stuart's grandson! Will he ever come back?"

"Parkins, turn off the gas from the log."

II

THE FOUR ROADS

“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

WALFORD had spent six months in New York, and already he measured his life by them. Memory declined to visualize the little Western town where he had lived through two-and-twenty years of his youth, never questioning the wealth of its resources. Why should he have questioned it? There were rows upon rows of comfortable houses where the residents were supremely occupied in residing. There were new buildings constantly going up, more commodious and no uglier than their predecessors, and there was a steady growth of the census report, which brought swelling pride to the heart of every loyal citizen of Alkali.

As he looked back upon it all now, it was as if through a veil of the dust of the plains. The present alone had tangible reality. At twenty-five he felt that he had just begun to live.

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New York "haunted him like a passion." He felt an intoxication in its very air, and he threw himself eagerly into each passing experience. He had visited every picture-gallery; he knew every orchestral program by heart; he had dined in rich men's palaces; he had heard great orators and felt the thrill of their speech. But, after all, there was nothing like the city streets. They had taught him more than all the rest, and he was accustomed to walk up and down the great thoroughfares from Broadway to the Bowery, in a delighted absorption, studying the myriad types of men drifting around him.

On this Sunday morning he was on his way from church to keep a luncheon engagement at a club, and as he strolled up Fifth Avenue, unconsciously he caught the gaiety of the crowd which surged up and down in all colors of the rainbow, like a flight of butterflies sunning themselves in the soft spring air.

At a broad window of the club toward which Walford's steps were tending, two men sat in deep leather arm-chairs, viewing the scene beneath them with lazy enjoyment.

"How intensely alive it all is!" said one of the spectators, a tall man with thinly parted, colorless hair. "It gives me a qualm to think of tearing myself away from a show like this to go to a funeral."

"You going to a funeral this afternoon, Fleming? I wonder if it's mine."

"You don't look like it, Yates."

The speaker smiled as he watched the flushed face and stout figure opposite.

Yates wore a scarf-pin in the shape of a telephone mouthpiece, yet he had his good points.

"Oh," he explained with superfluous exactness, "I did n't mean mine in that sense; I mean the one I'm going to—the services in memory of my uncle, Richard Blythe."

"Curious!" exclaimed a third man, dropping the newspaper which he had been reading, and drawing up his chair. "I am going there, too. I was Blythe's physician awhile ago, before I gave up practice."

Fleming chuckled.

"'Earth covers the doctor's errors,' Newton," he said.

"It would be a lucky thing for Blythe if it covered the errors of the patients," Newton answered, and then added, "I forgot that you said he was your uncle, Yates."

"Don't apologize! You can't hurt my feelings by any remarks. I'll tell you what I think when I've read the will."

"His will is in my box at the safe-deposit

20 FOUR ROADS TO PARADISE

company," said Fleming, quietly. "I have told my clerk to send you a copy to-morrow."

Yates opened his eyes wide.

"I did n't know you knew my uncle so well. Have you been his counsel long?"

"Ten years or so. Excuse me! I must look out for a guest who is coming — Mr. Walford. You know him, Newton?"

"I have seen him somewhere, but I can't remember where."

"He's the new assistant rector at St. Simeon's. You have probably seen his picture in the Sunday papers, bracketed with Dr. Milner's, this morning. He's another recruit for the service this afternoon, and lunches with me here first. Blythe was a parishioner, you know."

As Fleming spoke, the other men turned their glance toward the slender, dark-eyed man who entered the room preceded by a uniformed bell-boy, and threaded his way among the groups of idlers. He looked about him inquiringly, until his search ended in Fleming, and he smiled illuminatingly as Fleming moved to meet him.

"That smile ought to be worth ten thousand a year to a clergyman," Newton said to Yates under his breath, rising to greet the newcomer.

"Dr. Newton, Mr. Walford — and Mr. Yates," said Fleming.

The men bowed: Yates like an American, as if conferring an honor, Newton like a European, as if receiving one.

“We were just speaking of the funeral this afternoon. We are all going—Dr. Newton was Mr. Blythe’s physician and Mr. Yates is his nephew.”

“Indeed!” said Walford, non-committally; then turning to Yates, “Your uncle was a liberal supporter of our church charities.”

“A good advertisement, that giving to charities,” Yates answered. “Uncle Richard never gave anything that people did n’t hear of, I guess.”

“Oh, come, Yates,” Fleming observed, “that ’s not fair play. There is always more than an even chance that the living are speaking ill of you, so that what you say of them is only give and take; but when their mouths are shut, yours ought to be.”

“Yes,” said Newton, “silence in regard to the dead is an easy form of charity; but I pity the clergyman called upon for a post-mortem eulogy. There ’s where your church service is such a refuge. Fancy a man called upon to eulogize Richard Blythe, to tell what a benefit to mankind his example had been, and what a joy it would be to meet him again in heaven!”

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“Heaven! Does any one believe in it nowadays? Excuse me, Mr. Walford; I forgot the cloth for the moment.”

It was Fleming who spoke.

Walford forced himself to smile. Had he not resolved to be all things to all men, and was not this a phase of life and thought with which he was bound to come in touch, at least from the outside?

“Please go on,” he said. “Is it your opinion that most people do not believe in heaven?”

“No more than they do in the Beatitudes or the Golden Rule,” said Yates, going further than Fleming had intended.

“It’s a golden rule that won’t work both ways,” he murmured, ready to sacrifice his reputation for intelligence for the sake of changing the subject; but the topic was a Frankenstein creation which, once called into existence, would not down at the bidding of its creator.

“I don’t suppose,” said Newton, fixing his hawk eyes on Fleming, “that one in a hundred of these people who have just come out of their churches could give an intelligible account of his idea of heaven, or even of what he would wish it to be.”

“‘Heaven is the vision of fulfilled desire,’” said Fleming, wondering if anything short of an

order for drinks would drive Frankenstein's man back to his lair.

"*All* desires?" Newton asked in his rasping voice.

Fleming shrugged his shoulders. "The words are Omar's, not mine," he said.

But Newton returned to the charge.

"Tell us, Yates, what would your idea of heaven be?"

As he spoke, Dr. Newton settled back in his chair and lighted a cigar, while he looked at Yates through half-closed lids, curiously, as he would have inspected a lizard or a beetle. He noted the angle extending outward from the temples to the base of the jaw, the puffy circles about the eyes, and he felt that it would greatly interest him to know what conception of the spiritual world lay imbedded in that individuality.

"Well," said Yates, playing with his watch-chain, "I believe in taking your good times while you can get them here on earth. I like yachts and horses and automobiles and all that—"

"That is," said Fleming, giving up the contest and yielding to the inevitable, "given plenty of money, you'd guarantee to make a heaven of your own. What would *you* say, Newton? What would your heaven be?"

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"I confess I have no views of the future state. I hold no chair of eschatology, and my ambitions for this world are quite modest."

"For instance?"

The question roused Newton to a new energy. He sat up straight and buttoned his rough tweed coat close over his chest. His fine bearing and ill-fitting clothes gave him a curious effect of being a cross between a prince incognito and a tramp cognito.

His eyes shot fire from under his shaggy eyebrows as he answered: "My ambition? Simply to put myself to school to learn something of the laws under which we live. Here we are, several hundred millions of atoms clinging to a small dependency of a small sun. The breath of life lasts with each of us a mere fraction of the time it takes for a ray of light from the distant stars to reach us. Now, with such an ephemeral existence, nothing seems worth while except to occupy ourselves with guesses at truth and some effort to solve the world-enigma.

"But, after all," said Fleming, "that is a question of duty, not of happiness."

"I can't imagine finding happiness in anything which we realize as lasting only for a moment. We must hook our lives on to the eternities to give them any significance. Know-

ledge, after all, is a coral island, built on millions of dead workers."

"But this does not touch the question of individual pleasure."

"Oh," said Newton, "if you ask what my idea of pleasure is, I should say work. If you ask what reward, I should say recognition of my work."

"Fame?"

"Not what most men mean by that. It would not gratify me in the least to see my name in five-inch letters on the front of a morning newspaper, still less to see my picture —" Here he paused, noting Walford's conscious flush, and then hurled himself toward his next remark, careless of connection: "Jury of my peers, that's what I wish to be tried by, and I am willing to accept the verdict. Come, Fleming, it's your turn."

"Oh, leave me out! I have no imagination."

"You are a fortunate man," said Newton. "Imagination is death to accurate deductions: it is a nuisance. Did you ever watch an assayer weigh a grain of gold? He puts the grain on the tiny scale, and then he draws down a glass case over it, so that there shall be no vibration of air to disturb the balance. That's the way we ought to measure truth — in a dead calm. In-

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stead of which, we turn imagination loose to blow a gale over it. A nuisance I call it, an unmitigated nuisance —”

“There I differ with you,” Fleming answered.

“Imagination is given to a man to console him for what he is not, as humor is given to him to console him for what he is. A man who has both is very near heaven already.”

“But your ambition?”

“Bless your inquiring soul, Newton, I have n't any! Time was, before my eyes gave out, when I expected to see the name of Blair Fleming writ large on the bill-board of history; but next to a career, the best thing is a good excuse for not achieving one.”

“Have you no hopes?”

“Hopes? Yes, I have hopes of getting through life with as little interference with or from my neighboring atoms as possible.”

“But your idea of heaven?”

“A land where I should never be bored — Utopian, you see.”

“Perhaps,” said Newton, giving up Fleming and turning to the latest comer, “Mr. Walford will give us his views.”

Walford, who till now had been an interested and amused, if somewhat shocked, onlooker, found himself suddenly dragged into the mêlée.

"I — I am afraid I have no views worth contributing," he stammered, awkwardly fingering the prayer-book in his hand.

"Oh, well, now," said Fleming, "you know we don't expect an inspired account; we only wish to know what you think of when you say 'heaven.'"

"Shall I tell seriously?"

"Of course."

"Then I should say that it was a place where all men lived in obedience to the will of God, and that *my* highest heaven would lie in the thought that I had led them there."

"In short," said Newton, setting his tense, positive lips argumentatively, "your idea of heaven is influence?"

"Influence for good — yes, I suppose it reduces itself to that," Walford answered in evident embarrassment.

Fleming, perceiving that his guest was ill at ease in being thus crowded into a corner, stopped wiping his eye-glasses, stooped forward in order to thrust his handkerchief into his coat-tail pocket, and said:

"Suppose for heaven we substitute paradise — that word is depolarized, and we may speak our minds more freely. To Yates, paradise means money. Newton declares for work and the

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credit for it. And you want influence — influence for good. I wonder if any of you will attain your paradise.”

Walford noticed that Fleming had really said nothing of himself, and he would have liked to ask further; but something forbade. The young clergyman had learned many things in the few months of his stay in New York. Men here intrenched themselves behind a barrier of reserve. What was sympathy in the West became curiosity in the East, and it was not permitted to inquire too closely. He had noticed, too, how much less strenuously for the most part men in the metropolis held their beliefs. Opinion seemed to be flats, not homesteads. They were shorn of association and sacredness, and liable to be changed at convenience, or were at least open to alteration on any promise of betterment. He was not sure that he preferred it to the provincialism where “I have always thought” was reason good. To him it savored of levity; and yet he could not deny that it gave a sense of spaciousness to talk.

Newton irritated him. The doctor had a way of saying: “Is that your point of view? How very interesting!” which reduced one to the status of a specimen. But Fleming was different. Walford felt that he understood that long,

lazy man with the colorless hair, and to comprehend is to possess. Yet he was troubled by Fleming's views and unreligious attitude of mind. He wished devoutly that his influence for good might begin with Fleming.

His thoughts were interrupted by seeing Yates yawn, first surreptitiously, then openly, and finally rise and look at his watch.

"Do you lunch at the club, too, Newton?" Yates asked. "I presume you are in town for the day?"

"Yes," Newton answered. "I have moved to the suburbs for work; but for relaxation New York is the only place."

"And your wife — does she like life on Long Island?"

"Oh, yes; she loves her potato-patch and her poultry better than anything that Fifth Avenue could give her."

"Suburbanity!" Fleming murmured under his breath.

As the group broke up, Yates drew Fleming a little aside, and stood for the moment tilting a chair back and forth in some embarrassment. At last breaking the silence with which Fleming declined to meddle, he said:

"You have been Mr. Blythe's counsel for ten years?"

"I have."

"Then you probably know his daughter-in-law."

"Mrs. Richard Blythe, Jr.?"

"Yes."

"I have met her occasionally."

"A charming man Anne Blythe is."

Fleming bowed.

"Her husband, Dick Blythe, was rather a brute," Yates went on.

"So I have heard."

"He took after his father. But the old man seemed fond of his son's widow. She was at the head of his house, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"Would there be any harm in asking if the bulk of my uncle's fortune goes to her?"

"No harm whatever."

"Well, then — does it?"

"The harm would lie in my answering. You and Mrs. Blythe will each receive a copy of will to-morrow. Before that you may excuse me from talking on the subject."

"Humph!" said Yates, as he left the room and walked slowly down the marble steps, planned for princes and trod by plebeians, "Fleming need n't be so touchy. Of all the fool things in the world, professional etiquette is the damn-foolishest."

III

ANNE BLYTHE

"About the nations runs a saw
That over-good ill fortune breeds."

IT was the afternoon of the third day after the funeral when Stuart Walford rang the bell of the Blythe mansion, and on inquiring for Mrs. Blythe was shown into the drawing-room, which ran the length of the house on the street side of the hall.

This was Walford's first call of condolence, and he wished devoutly that Dr. Milner had been at home to make it in his place; but he told himself that, after all, it was an experience and an opportunity for influence; moreover, the reports which he had heard of Mrs. Blythe, whom he had not yet seen, led him to think that she would be of a new and interesting type. Altogether it was in a mixed state of mind that he entered the drawing-room.

The time of his waiting did not weary him,

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for he was so unaccustomed to New York that each new phase interested him, and the Blythe household represented distinctly a new phase. Ordinarily at this time of the year the rooms would have been swathed in those cerements of white linen in which the best houses stand after the first of May, awaiting their resurrection in the autumn. But Mr. Blythe's illness had postponed all this springtime demolition. Heavy draperies still covered the windows, Eastern rugs lay their palm-leaf length on the slippery floor, and the fine paintings on the wall hung undisguised by swathings.

It was one of the pictures which had fixed Walford's attention so closely as to make him oblivious of the time occupied by Mrs. Blythe in her toilet. The painter was a Frenchman, and had chosen his subject for its theatrical effectiveness and its adaptability to composition—a young girl of noble family taking the veil in a Carmelite convent: on one side the dim throng of sad-colored nuns, on the other the court circle in gorgeous garb, and in the center this slim virginal figure, with the meager charm of a Botticelli Madonna, bending its golden head to receive the obliterating veil.

Walford's awakening esthetic sense took in vaguely the glow of color and the grace of line;

but he was still unsophisticated enough to be affected by the story told by the painter, and he felt himself strongly moved by the pathos of it all.

So absorbed had he become that he was almost startled by the rustle of skirts and the tap of a slippers foot on the oak stairs. He rose stiffly and awaited the coming interview, his thoughts rapidly passing in review the course which he had determined that it should take.

First he would introduce himself and explain his coming, then he would struggle through the period of condolence, then he would glide off into church-work, for his lately acquired worldly wisdom taught him not to overlook the possible value of the Blythe fortune to the St. Simeon Mission.

Mrs. Blythe entered. Walford had a confused impression of a slight figure, a small head held loftily, hazel eyes with high lights in them, and curling lashes which lent a childlike expression to a glance otherwise somewhat defiant in its directness. Walford instinctively suspended judgment on her beauty till she should speak: after she had spoken he forgot to have an opinion.

Mrs. Blythe bade him good morning as easily as if she had known him all her life, and motioned him to be seated, while for herself she selected a low easy-chair covered with pale-green brocade.

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Walford began at once on the little speech which he had prepared on the street and sorted on the steps.

"I have come," he said, "at the request of Dr. Milner, who is out of town, to bring you a message of sympathy in your sorrow."

The candid eyes looked full into his face for an instant.

"It was very good in you—in him; but, to be quite frank with you, I do not need it."

Involuntarily Walford's gaze swept over her black dress and rested on the dark circles beneath her eyes.

Mrs. Blythe answered as if he had spoken.

"Yes, I know; but they are deceptive. I wear black because I wish the world to think that I am sorry, and I have been crying because I am not."

Walford had come armed with several felicitous quotations from Thomas à Kempis and Phillips Brooks, but clearly they would not fit. Fortunately, he chanced upon the simplest and therefore the best form of speech.

"Tell me about it all, please. That is, if you can."

"I think," Anne began hesitatingly, "that I should like to tell you, if you have time to listen. Yes, I *should* like to tell you, though I know you

so little — perhaps because I know you so little. I have been decorous, and said just what I ought, till I can't bear it any longer. I *must* speak out."

As long as women go to church and have clergymen, they will continue to make injudicious confidences to them. It is the legacy of many hundred years. But Anne thought little of this as she sat looking down, pushing the great diamond round and round on her slender third finger. Her mind was altogether fixed on herself and her own troubles. The man before her was only an escape-valve, a vent. She began at last explosively.

"For the last year and a half I have lived here under Richard Blythe's roof in what the world calls perfect comfort. I have had fine clothes to wear, and carriages to drive in at such hours as suited Mr. Blythe. Friends I have had none — he did not approve. His footstep in the hall of an afternoon was the first sound to break the stillness. Then came the drive in the park without a friendly word — just the monotonous sound of the horses' feet. Afterward came dinner, long and solemn and silent; then the evening in the library, where he liked me to play to him; and then he would take down his son's picture from the mantel and talk, talk, talk about him."

"That at least must have been a comfort."

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“Comfort? It was a torture. I wonder, in looking back, why I endured the last eighteen months; and yet I know why well enough. It was the same thing that made me marry Richard Blythe’s son — I loved luxury. I was only eighteen when I was married. I knew I was marrying for money; but I did not know what it meant.”

Walford’s eyes looked his sympathy.

“For four years we lived together as man and wife,” she continued. “I never look back upon that time — I cannot. It was hell!”

The silence was broken only by the tick of the clock on the mantel. Anne Blythe could scarcely articulate for the dryness in her throat, but when she spoke again it was calmly enough.

“He died at last, cursing God and man, and most of all his wife.”

There was bitterness in her voice. It grew as she went on.

“His father took the same view: it was my fault; all young fellows sowed their wild oats; men were what their wives made them. I knew my lesson well.”

“At least it is over now.”

“Yes,” she exclaimed, her look changing swiftly from bitterness to exultation. “It is over now, and I mean to be happy, to lead my own life.”

“It ought to be a happy life which lies before a woman like you, with youth and health and a great fortune.”

“So you have heard that,” she said quickly. “Perhaps you think I ought to be grateful to Mr. Blythe for leaving me his millions; but I’m not. He had to leave them to some one, and he hated the Yateses. Besides, the humiliating conditions! But never mind those; I have put everything behind me except the joy of belonging to myself and being the woman I always meant to be.”

“Perhaps it is not an opportune time to bring up the matter; but later,—it might do you good,—if we could interest you in our parish work among the poor—”

Mrs. Blythe put up a deprecating hand, palm outward.

“Thank you, no! I know nothing of your poor. I wish to know less. It is *my* life I mean to lead—*mine*, not Bridget’s in the tenement nor Jacob’s in the sweat-shop. I have had enough of vice and misery. The corners of my soul are full of their germs; I want a great wave of happiness to wash it all clean. Oh, can’t you see!”

“Yes, yes,” Walford answered, “I do see. I understand perfectly.”

“Thank you; it’s awfully good in you to

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understand. You don't know what it means to me, after living with a man like my father-in-law, who never would —”

“Perhaps he could n't —”

“He never wished to.”

“And yet I think,” said Walford, softly, “that he was very fond of you.”

“Of me!” Anne sat bolt upright, and her eyes grew round as china plates.

“Yes, I am sure of it.”

“Why, please?”

“He took so much trouble —”

“Yes — to trouble me.”

“Exactly.”

“But —”

“Oh, I don't say it 's agreeable to be loved in that fashion, and no doubt it was selfish in Mr. Blythe; but don't you see how he tried to keep you with him and to keep other people away, and to make you talk with him about *your* — about his son, and all the time he grew more and more bitter and exacting because he could n't make you show what you felt? But he could n't any more than if he had been pouring gall and wormwood over a marble statue.”

“I think,” said Anne, with a tired little sigh, “I prefer admiration to love. It demands so much less.”



“‘YES, YES,’ WALFORD ANSWERED, ‘I DO SEE. I UNDERSTAND PERFECTLY.’”

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“Perhaps that is because you never loved.”

Walford trembled at his audacity when he had spoken, but his words gave no offense.

“It is wonderful,” Anne murmured, “perfectly wonderful, how you understand!”

The words were spoken like a little child. Walford half smiled as he rose.

“I will not stay longer now,” he said, “for I see that you are overstrained and need rest; but if at any time you would like to talk with me, you have only to let me know.”

“Thank you again. It means a great deal to me — your sympathy. If you get hold of every one as you have of me, there will be no end to your influence here in New York.”

Walford colored and hesitated a moment. Should he tell her? “No,” said Intuition, which taught him that mutual confidences cheapen each other, and that no afternoon is long enough for two souls to unburden themselves.

As Anne stretched out her hand at parting, her handkerchief dropped to the floor. Walford stooped awkwardly enough to pick it up. The faint scent of the bit of black-edged cobweb clung to his glove.

On the steps he lingered to look at his watch and wonder how much time he had before the Penny Provident meeting. To his surprise, he

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found that he was late already; yet he did not hasten. His thoughts were still in the shaded parlor. He still saw that luminous pale face, those frank mutinous eyes. And he had ministered to that sore heart. Yes, she had said so, and — what was it? That there might be no end to his influence here in this great city. She had not guessed how near at hand the end was. Here he broke off abruptly and turned to another line of thought.

How did it happen, he wondered, that he, a clergyman, had gone to the house of mourning and had said no word of spiritual consolation or exhortation — that his only answer to words of rebellion and self-assertion had been, “I understand perfectly”?

From this he turned to still another theme, and tried to conjure up the vision of Mrs. Blythe as she looked sitting in that deep chair against the green of the brocade. He found it a task beyond his powers. Analysis is necessary to recollection, and analysis is possible only to the calm observer.

As for Anne, after her talk with Walford, her spirits rebounded violently. A consciousness of imprudence is an exhilarating tonic. She had spoken out. On the whole, she was not sorry. The explosion was bound to come, and under other circumstances the confidence might have

been much more dangerous. She had, as it were, shrived herself before a priest, who was bound to observe professional reticence. Moreover, Mr. Walford, with his awkward manner and his Western accent, was not quite of her world, and she would be spared that annoying consciousness which besets us in constant meetings with those to whom we have laid our hearts inconveniently bare.

Yes, she was glad, distinctly glad. Let that be the last word on the past. Now for the future! With a light heart she tripped up the stairs to her little boudoir. On the desk lay a letter from her uncle, Bishop Alston. She was very fond of the Bishop, and she opened and read the letter eagerly:

“MY DEAR ANNE: I will not pretend to condole with you over Mr. Blythe’s death. I know how difficult your position was and how strained the relations between you and him have been since your husband died. Under the circumstances the parting must be a relief. I suppose, as there are no nearer heirs, you will have a large share of the property. If so, remember that the only return you can make is by allowing no reflection to be cast upon Mr. Blythe’s memory. Believe me, my dear niece, there is nothing equal

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in dignity to silence. Do not be misled by any desire to put your side of the story before the world. The world will thrust its tongue into its cheek and believe just what it chooses anyway. [Anne bit her lip as she remembered the flow of confidences to the curate an hour ago.] But forgive my sermonizing pen if it runs away with me [the letter went on]; I did not take it up to lecture, but to beg. I want a visit—a good long visit—from you as soon as your affairs are settled and you can leave New York with a comfortable sense of leisure. Remember I am past sixty-three, and, as my friend FitzGerald says: ‘We grand climactericals must not procrastinate, much less pro-annuate.’ Come to me, and write me when you will come, that I may be glad beforehand.

“I often blame myself, in looking over your life, that I did not make a stronger effort to have you under my charge in your childhood. Sometimes I have thought that things might have been different if I had. Your mother, as you know, was my favorite sister, but after her death your father and I drifted apart, never having had very much in common, so that when he died and left you in care of his sister, I felt no right to interfere, though I dreaded the effect of her worldliness on your inexperience. Not that

I objected to her being a woman of fashion — quite the contrary. I have always felt that a knowledge of the world is the best safeguard against being led away by it. The crassest worldliness and materialism with which I have met have not been among the very poor or the very rich, but in the temperate zone of society, in the smaller towns and among people of moderate means, like your Aunt Fanny. In her case a large ambition and a small income went as badly together as a great empire and little minds. They combined to force her into a position neither dignified nor commendable, and her rejoicings over your marriage with the son of a rich man went far beyond the bounds of good taste, and laid both her and you open to severe criticism. I am afraid that in my disapprobation I withdrew from the situation too abruptly and too far. But an end to this long letter, and let me know when to expect you.

“ Affectionately your uncle,

“ LAWRENCE G. ALSTON.

“ P.S. How did you like my curate ? ”

When Mrs. Blythe had finished reading, she sat for some time musing, her head resting on her hand. At length she drew out a sheet of black-crested paper and began a response :

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“DEAR UNCLE [she wrote]: I am impelled to answer your letter at once, to tell you that it is as you foresaw. I am left heir to the Blythe estate. Certain substantial sums, enough to look well in the morning papers under the heading ‘Beneficences of One of our Leading Millionaires,’ are left to charities. A hundred thousand dollars go to Tom and Eunice Yates. The rest to me, under a restriction which does not surprise me at all. In case of my marrying again, the terms of the will are to be reversed. I am to have the Yateses’ share, and they mine. Somewhat humiliating, this clause, but of no practical effect. I have burned my fingers once, and shall never try the fire of matrimony again. So this does not disturb my satisfaction.

“*I mean to be happy*—I wish I knew how to write it in capitals large enough to express the height and depth of my intention. There is not a creature in the world to whom I owe any particular obligation, so I shall adopt myself, and I intend to treat myself as a philanthropist treats his favorite charity. Thanks for your invitation! Sometime I shall be delighted to accept it; but just at present I am thoroughly used up with all the excitement and nervous strain of the last six weeks,—indeed, of the last six years,—and I am anxious to get away from

it all for a while, to put a space of actual distance, as well as of time, between me and my past; so I am arranging to sail for Europe early in June, and I want you to go with me as— whatever is the masculine of chaperon.

“Tell me that you will, there ’s a dear!

“Don’t shake your mitered locks and say it is impossible. Even a bishop owes something to family ties, and all your churches and charges and institutions together do not need you half as much as I do. We will summer on the coast of France in a dear little niche of the Brittany coast close by St. Malo, then in the autumn we ’ll jog along down to Rome, reserving judgment on Athens and Cairo. In the spring we ’ll take a villa at Florence for a while, and after that you shall come home if you must. Remember I count upon you, and meanwhile be assured that you know no one more in need of spiritual advice than

“Your loving niece,

“ANNE BLYTHE.

“P.S. I saw your young curate to-day and was quite taken by surprise. I shall make a point of seeing a great deal of him when we come home.”

Her letter finished, Anne rang for the

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brougham. The day was mild and lovely. Secretly she would have preferred the victoria; but the conventions were against it. As it was, the open windows of the brougham allowed the soft breezes to play through her hair and cool her hot cheeks. Care for the time withdrew, and left her mind open to all the influences of the moment. As the carriage entered the park, her eyes took in with pleasure the line of nurses gossiping in groups and wheeling the baby-carriages with averted heads. A turn of the road brought her to a green space where a group of boys were tossing a ball to and fro; and farther on, joyous shouts drew her attention to a May-party, the little queen leading a tumultuous procession insubordinate to her mild authority, each child bent on his individual enjoyment regardless of the rest. Only one conscientious elder sister held fast to the chubby hand of the littlest one, dragging reluctant toes along the rough asphalt.

“What a world of children it is!” thought Anne, and stifled a sigh only half understood.

Before the cross-road at McGown’s Pass was reached, the fresh air had raised her spirits to such a degree that she found herself humming softly under her breath the tune which the May-party had been singing as she passed:

“ London Bridge is falling down,
My fair lady!
Build it up with bricks and stones,
My fair lady!”

London Bridge seemed to rise before her as her own life. It was lying in ruins now; but she would build it up again. The bricks should be of gold, and its walls should echo with mirth and laughter.

She was still in this mood of slippery exaltation when the carriage drew up again before her own door. For the first time she looked up at the broad expanse of brownstone and plate-glass with a thrill of pleasure in the pride of ownership. It had been a prison; but she forgave it its past in the promise of its future.

The man at the door announced that some one was waiting to see her in the office. As Mrs. Blythe walked the length of crimson-carpeted hall she gloried in being ruler of her fate, and bestowed a moment's pity on the women whose lives were inextricably tangled with the sordid and the commonplace. Entering the office, she found herself suddenly face to face with a woman whom she had never seen before — a young woman, with a child in her arms.

Anne Blythe's heart sank with a strange premonition of coming evil.

IV

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

"The beginning of wisdom is the desire of discipline."

WHEN Blair Fleming came home from his office late in the afternoon, he found awaiting him a note from Mrs. Blythe, asking that he would come to see her in the evening on important business.

He and Mrs. Blythe had been left co-executors and trustees, and in consequence of this summons he pondered a good deal on matters connected with the Blythe estate, as he assimilated a brace of chops and absorbed a modest pint of claret in the grill-room of the club.

Ordinarily he looked upon business thoughts at meal-times as nails in a man's coffin. He made a point of dining with the dullest of his fellow-clubmen rather than run the risk of slipping into the mulling habit which neither relaxes nor achieves.

To-night, however, he took a vacation from

his resolutions. He deliberately abandoned the dining-room and its companionship for the solitude which he found himself able to secure in the grill-room. Why had Mrs. Blythe sent for him? was his first questioning thought. Not that he objected to the summons—in fact, he had intended calling this evening or to-morrow; but he knew of nothing demanding such immediate attention, unless, as seemed not improbable, she wished to announce her coming marriage and to seek his advice as to her rights under the will. Fleming suspected that she had some cause to fear friction, as Yates had the reputation downtown of being a difficult man to deal with. Indeed, this reputation of his as a hard business man had led Fleming to anticipate some suggestion of protest against the will, and he often wondered if Yates and his sister were planning anything of the kind. Perhaps Yates had in mind the possibility of marrying Mrs. Blythe himself. That had not occurred to Fleming's mind before; but, once admitted, it offered many possibilities. The question of most interest then would become, What were Mrs. Blythe's views? He hoped that this evening would carry some enlightenment on the subject, and he looked forward with interest and amused curiosity to the coming interview.

4

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It was nine o'clock when he reached the house. He found Mrs. Blythe waiting for him in the library. A twisted dragon in Japanese bronze held up a softly shaded electric lamp on the study table, and a low fire flamed on the hearth, sputtering now and then as if in anger at the damp chill of the evening outside.

Fleming noticed as he entered that Mrs. Blythe was looking pale and worn and worried in spite of the forced smile with which she rose to greet him. There was no suggestion of bridal happiness, no blushes; rather a preoccupation so deep as to be scarcely broken by Fleming's entrance. It was with an evident effort that she compelled herself to the opening civilities of greeting.

"I am sorry to trouble you with business in your evening hours—"

"Not at all; I had intended to come before I had your note. You have read the will I sent you?"

"Thank you. Yes, I have read the will."

"It is an unusual will — in fact, confidentially, let me say it is a beastly will. I tried my best to induce Mr. Blythe to draw it differently; but he was not easy to influence, as you perhaps know."

Anne shrugged her shoulders. Alas! did she not know it only too well?

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM 53

“That clause in regard to your marrying—”

“Never mind,” said Anne, wearily; “I have no intention of marrying, so it all makes very little difference to me.”

“Ah,” thought Fleming, “so the Yates marriage is not a live hypothesis.”

“Pardon me, Mrs. Blythe,” he said aloud, “but this is a matter about which I feel that I must speak freely, though I realize how distasteful it may be to you. You have done me the honor to make me your counsel, and I should not be doing my duty if I did not point out to you all the possibilities that lie before you. It is entirely natural that you should not at present think of marriage as one of these possibilities; but you are a young woman, and the future may hold many things—”

“Not that.”

“Perhaps not; but the question is whether it would not be wise to put yourself in a position where you are wholly free to decide the matter, if it should come up, with no hampering restrictions.”

Anne drew her finger-tips wearily across her forehead.

“I suppose I am very dull, but I don’t see what you mean.”

“I mean just this, and please understand that

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it is not my advice, but only the opening of the question whether you would prefer a compromise by which you agree to some sort of division with Mr. Yates and his sister, and they agree to make no further claim."

Anne sat up very straight. The impetuous color rose in her cheeks, and the climbing fire-light, touching, made it brighter still.

"I see no reason why I should give part of my property to the Yateses. As for marrying, I have no such intention. I have seen enough of it."

Fleming, finding speech difficult, took refuge in silence, looking down at the seal on his fob and withdrawing himself from the situation.

Mrs. Blythe began again, with a little less emphasis: "Perhaps if I should change my mind later, why, then —"

Fleming shook his head.

"Yates is an obstinate man," he said, "obstinate and shrewd. He will watch you closely, and he will not hesitate to put on the screws if he gets the chance."

Anne colored faintly.

"I don't think I have anything to fear from Tom. Now, Eunice — do you know Eunice Yates at all?"

"I have met her, I think, though all I re-

member is a Madonna face and a manner that matched it."

"Oh, yes, Eunice would never wear a manner that did n't match; but somehow I prefer Tom with all his — his — oh, well, you know what I mean."

Fleming was good at drawing inferences, and rapidly made his deductions now.

"Yates is in love with her; his sister objects. Mrs. Blythe may marry him, but she's not in love." Naturally he did not put these thoughts into words. He only looked his comprehension. His conversation usually had an interest quite apart from the thing said, in the sense of relations established. Anne felt it now, and yet was conscious of no desire to burst into confidences as she had done with Walford. There was a restraint in his sympathy, as if it said: "Tell me everything that I need to know, but nothing for which you will be sorry afterward."

"Thank you for calling my attention to this question," Anne went on in a moment. "I shall take it up later. Of course, too, I should not act in such a matter without your advice; but there is plenty of time to go over all that later. Just now there is something more pressing, something about which I feel that I must consult you at once. That is my excuse for sending for you to-night."

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Anne hesitated; but Fleming could not help her, and kept silence. At length she went on: "A woman came to see me this afternoon. She had a child with her. She said it was my husband's."

A deep, painful flush swept up to Anne's hair. Fleming turned away his eyes, and finally rose and took a turn or two up and down the room. When he came back he stood looking down into the fire with his elbow on the mantel.

"Insolent!" he murmured; then aloud: "Surely you did not waste a thought over one of those impostors who make a regular business of following up the funerals of rich men with demands and accusations?"

"Her story is true — at least, I think so. The child is like him, and she has letters —"

It was spoken impassively and in one key, like a lesson learned by rote.

"If it is true," Fleming's calm voice struck in, "what then? We will not believe her story till it is proved to the utmost, and even then, what claim has she?"

Anne made a little gesture of dissent.

"I have said the same thing over and over to myself; but her story *is* true, and I shall *have* to do something."

"Of course you will wish to do your duty,"

Fleming began; but Anne interrupted him scornfully:

“Duty! I detest doing my duty. It means making myself unhappy in order to make some one else happy, and there ’s no philosophy in it, for really if only one can be happy, it might as well be I as the other one.”

“That seems a sound proposition.” As Fleming made this remark, he was conscious of resisting a temptation to smile.

“Oh, I know,” Anne went on, “many women have to meet these things; but, you see, I do so want to be happy! I thought at last I was going to be. I was happy this very afternoon; but I came in from my drive to find this woman waiting for me, and ever since I ’ve been miserable.” As she said this she leaned forward, clasping her hands in her eagerness, her lips apart, like a child seeking sympathy.

Fleming realized that a complication had arisen. Hitherto Mrs. Blythe had been to him simply a client, to be advised on the legal aspect of her affairs; now he felt suddenly that he was called to deal with a human soul, full of blind impulses and likely to turn to him for guidance. On the whole, he did not like it. His indomitable cheerfulness had survived the drawing of many blanks in the lottery of life; but he

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had reached a point where he felt that he needed all his courage for himself, and was less prodigal of sympathy than he might have been ten years before. "Bear ye your own burdens" was his rendering of Scripture.

In his desire to shake himself free from all but professional relations to the situation, he returned somewhat abruptly to the subject under discussion.

"What did this woman give as her name?"

"Jaudon—Renée Jaudon. Her father, she said, had been an officer in the French army, and she had worked to support him till—till she met my husband."

"A familiar story! We lawyers grow rather fatigued with hearing of the superhuman virtue which has always characterized the careers of these women up to the time of their 'misfortunes,' as they call them."

"Oh, I don't care anything about her, or whether her story is true or false, except so far as it concerns the child. I have no sympathy whatever with her. No matter what her troubles have been, they were of her own making."

So spoke Anne the Pharisee, quite forgetful of the tears which had bedewed her handkerchief and the sympathy which she had demanded of Walford this afternoon for woes equally of her own making.

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"She asked for money, of course," said Fleming.

"Yes; she said it seemed hard that with a great fortune like this, the grandson, the *only* grandson," — Anne laid bitter stress on the word, — "should have none of it — that people might say —"

"Ah," Fleming repeated, "'people might say.' She said that, did she? That looks as if blackmail were her game. Have you made up your mind what you wish to do? Have you any plan?"

"No — not really. There seem to be so many objections to everything. My first thought was to give the woman ten thousand dollars, on condition that I never saw her face again."

"Give a woman like that ten thousand dollars, and you may be very sure that you would see her face again as soon as the money was gone."

"Yes, and then it would n't do the child any good," said Anne; "and if I have a responsibility, it is to the child."

"As for the child," Fleming said, deliberating, "I think we must get that away at once. It is a powerful weapon in her hands and always to be feared. The mother might be made to sign papers renouncing all claim to the child; but what then?"

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"Yes," said Anne, "that 's just the question: what then?"

"I think, Mrs. Blythe," said Fleming, "that this is a matter in which there is great danger in haste. Naturally you are overwrought from this afternoon and in no condition to come to any important decision, least of all such a far-reaching one as this."

Anne found a curious comfort in studying Fleming as he stood there before her. In his careful evening dress, with his tranquil manner and his unstressed speech, he seemed a solid reminder that the world was moving along in the old accustomed grooves, while this afternoon she had felt as if she were the victim of a cataclysm which had shaken life to its foundations.

Her nerves calmed themselves and her voice returned to its normal key, as she motioned Fleming to a chair, saying:

"What would you advise me to do?"

Fleming kept silence for some time, his head bent and his forehead in a meditative pucker. At last he spoke:

"I cannot answer at once. I shall have to think it over. Here we have been talking as if everything were proved; but it is easy to be cheated in such a matter. You have seen the woman only once. She may have taken advan-

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tage of a chance resemblance. No? Well, at least we will investigate, have her story thoroughly sifted; and if, in the end, all is as she says, we may arrange some system of periodical payments dependent on her silence. But two things we must get from her before you give her a dollar — the child and the bundle of letters.”

“The letters? I don’t care about them,” she said.

“That again you cannot judge about to-night. The time may come when you will care, and she will surely use them to annoy you; but I will see to that.”

“Thank you. You are very good.”

“Good? Not at all. Remember one thing, my dear Mrs. Blythe: I am here to meet all the disagreeable things which may need to be said or done. That is what you have me for. As for this — this person, it is not decent that you should have to talk with her, and you need n’t; I am sure you need n’t, except for some necessary signing of papers, perhaps, at the end. Send her to me, and don’t worry.”

Anne held out her hand cordially as Fleming rose to take leave, and there was a distinctly personal note in her voice as she bade him good night.

Fleming, on his part, had an equally keen consciousness of new relations established, and

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he was by no means wholly pleased. Why had he told her not to worry? he asked himself. Why should n't she worry? And why should she, a grown woman, put in this ridiculous claim against Fate for happiness? Probably the thing she needed most was a taste of unhappiness, a sharp experience to show her what life really was to nine tenths of humanity. Some great sorrow might stir the depths; but, poor thing, no one likes muddy waters any better because it is an angel who has troubled them, and one could see that Mrs. Blythe would make a hard fight before she submitted to any discipline involving unhappiness. Perhaps a great affection—now if this child had been hers—

Here Fleming's thoughts drifted off to the legal aspects of the situation, on which he pondered as he strolled toward his club through the fine drizzle of rain which had taken the place of the balmy weather of the daytime.

They would be very lucky, he decided, if this woman, this Renée Jaudon, were satisfied to proclaim herself Blythe's mistress. Of course the scandal would be unpleasant for Mrs. Blythe, particularly if she had social aspirations; but if the woman undertook to claim a common-law marriage and set it previous to Mrs. Blythe's, then there would be an awkwardness.

So intent was he on his thoughts that he found himself under the nose of a cab-horse at the crossing, and saved himself only by reaching up and jerking violently at the bridle. The cabman swore at his inattention; but he paid little heed, and fell again into considering the question of Mrs. Blythe's marriage. Her denial of any such intention counted for very little in his mind. She was charming, therefore sure to have lovers; she was sympathetic and impressionable, therefore sure to respond to the love of some one of them. The question was, Who would it be — Yates?

At present that looked impossible. But Fleming was accustomed to seeing impossible marriages take place; moreover, the bluff and burly bearing of a man like Yates might in time impress a high-strung, nervous organization like Mrs. Blythe's by the mere law of opposite attractions. Of course such a marriage would be the end of any development for her.

Never did a philosopher speak truer word than that a woman's life is made by the love which she accepts. If Mrs. Blythe accepted Yates's, it was easy to fancy her, at middle age, one of those women who find the provincial successes of social New York soul-satisfying. It would be a pity, Fleming thought, for that quick flash of intelligence in her eye told of limitless

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capacity of response to influence. If it could only be the right influence!

Then he ran over in his mind the men of his acquaintance, searching who might be the one for Anne Blythe's husband. As rapidly as suggested, they were rejected, and he found himself driven back upon an ideal. This man of his imagination, he decided, should have youth and buoyancy and temperament, but under all a firm substratum of common sense and balance. That was what Mrs. Blythe needed more than anything else, balance — But what would she do about the child? Here his speculations ended as he furled his umbrella at the steps of the club.

V

OUTWARD BOUND

“The past is clean forgot
The present is and is not,
The future 's a sealed seed-plot,
And what betwixt them are we?”

THE weather was hot and sultry, hinting of August, though it was only the middle of June. A gentle breath of air from the river tempered the heat on the pier where the steamer, on which Mrs. Blythe and her uncle had taken passage, was making ready for her outward trip. The surface of the water was of mirrorlike smoothness. It was hard to realize that the vexed Atlantic was tumbling outside the bar of Sandy Hook.

Everything was bustle and confusion at the dock and on the vessel, except among the veteran travelers to whom an ocean steamer had come to seem only a ferryboat plying between commonplace and commonplace. Bishop Alston

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was one of these ; but to Mrs. Blythe the delight of travel had not yet been dulled by the commonizing touch of long experience. To her the steamer was like some live creature, a Europa's bull bearing her to enchanted shores where Spanish castles rose on every cliff.

Just now she was standing by the rail on the upper deck with Blair Fleming, who held a bundle of papers in his hand.

"Here are the letters," he said. "I secured them only this morning. I did not like to take the risk of sending them, so I brought them myself."

Mrs. Blythe made no motion to take them from Fleming's outstretched hand.

"I shall ask of you one more favor," she said.

"You have only to name it."

"Burn them for me."

Fleming looked down in some embarrassment.

"Pardon me, but as a measure of protection they should be read first. It is only common prudence."

"I cannot do it," Mrs. Blythe answered, with emphasis. "I simply cannot. Would it be asking too much—that you—that some one should do it for me?"

Fleming looked up gravely.

"I will do it, if it is your wish."

"I never can thank you enough! For me it would be like pouring vinegar into a wound. Oh, you don't know — you can't!"

Fleming felt that he would have been glad to follow Dick Blythe to Tartarus for the privilege of inflicting corporal punishment; but he could not put his feelings into words, so he said nothing.

Mrs. Blythe drew a long breath.

"I have one very unfortunate possession," she said.

"And that is?"

"An excellent memory." Then after a pause, "It is so easy to forgive when you have forgotten!"

"Perhaps," said Fleming, looking carefully away from Anne and fixing his eyes on the New Jersey shore — "perhaps it is easier to forget when we have forgiven."

Anne heard him absently.

"Sometimes," she said, with a sigh, "the past seems just as the dark used to when I was a small child. That is one reason why I am so glad to get away from America."

"But Europe is all past."

"Not *my* past!"

"No."

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“And that makes all the difference.”

“I suppose it does. I had n't thought of that.”

Mrs. Blythe was silent for a while, watching the crowd thronging over the gangway. At last she said, as if going on with a subject which she could not dismiss from her mind:

“Was the girl's story true?”

“Substantially, so far as I can trace it. She supported her father by working in a bookbindery supplied with leather by Mr. Blythe's firm.”

“I can imagine the rest,” said Anne, with a tremble in her voice. “And did she make any difficulties over the settlement?”

Fleming shook his head with cynical emphasis. “Two hundred dollars a month for three years seems to her a fortune, and she is more than willing, in consideration of it, to renounce all claims. As to parting with the child, it does not seem to trouble her. You see, that enables her to go back to her father, who fancies that she has been in France all these years.”

“And the child?”

“Everything is arranged as you desired. It is to be cared for by the Sisters of St. Clara for a year, and at the end of that time you are to decide what shall be done with it. They con-

sidered the terms which you offered liberal; but they stipulated that they should have no responsibility after the end of the year."

"Well, well," exclaimed Anne, shaking her head like a thoroughbred horse teased beyond endurance by some pestilent insect, "let us forget about it! A year is a long time. Perhaps the child may die."

Fleming wished that she had not said it, and then wondered why he cared. Looking up, he saw Stuart Walford waiting his opportunity for a word with Mrs. Blythe. At the same moment Bishop Alston approached from the opposite direction, holding by the arm a white-haired clergyman. Walford and Fleming withdrew.

"Here is Dr. Milner, Anne, come to see us off," the Bishop said, advancing.

"How very good in you! But you don't look well enough to have come," Anne exclaimed, moving forward toward the aged rector.

Milner was a striking man still, and looked handsome even standing as he was in contrast to Mrs. Blythe's radiant youthfulness. The beauty of youth is an ivory type, all curves and coloring; the beauty of age is an etching bitten out by the acids of time and experience.

"Yes, Milner," the Bishop said, repeating Anne's words, "you don't look fit to stand the

heat here. Why don't you run across the water yourself this summer? It will not do to neglect your health. A stitch in time, you know."

"But I have so many stitches loose and so little time left!" answered Milner, rather sadly. "My doctor does not speak encouragingly. But no matter. One more or less does not count except to himself. If I am not better by next summer, I shall give up my work permanently, and then it will be time to talk of rest and Europe."

"I don't like to hear you speak in that way," the Bishop answered gravely. "You are one of the important men. We can't do without you."

Milner smiled. "After all, flattery *can* 'soothe the dull, cold ear of death,'" he answered, "and I should like to think at the end that I was being missed by a few. I believe, however, that I have found the man to take up my work when I leave it, and carry it further than I could ever do. He is very young; but he has the promise and potency of a career in him. By the way, I owe him to you, Bishop."

"Is it Stuart Walford?"

At her uncle's question, Anne looked up quickly and waited for Dr. Milner's reply.

"Yes, it is Stuart Walford. I have been

pushing him forward in all directions, giving him a chance to show what he is good for, and he improves every opportunity. It seems incredible that a young, untried man could do what he has done, and in less than a year at that. In fact, I have no hesitation in predicting a brilliant future for him."

"Really?" said the Bishop.

"Yes, really. He is an eloquent preacher already, not on the curate order at all. He has force, magnetism, and the organizing power which we need more than anything else in the church to-day. He may accomplish great things if—"

"If what?" asked Mrs. Blythe, suddenly.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Blythe, when I say *if* the women will let him alone. He is young and handsome, and they find it easy to slide into a sympathetic, confidential relation with their spiritual adviser. I don't know that it does *them* any harm, but I am not sure whether his head is strong enough to stand it."

Anne had seen Mr. Walford several times since that first interview, and she realized that the conversation on each occasion had been distinctly sympathetic and confidential.

"Is Walford an ambitious man?" the Bishop asked.

“He has never spoken — at least not to me — of any definite ambition, but I can see that he craves influence, — perhaps all of us do, — and he said the other day that he thought the rector of a great New York church occupied the most desirable position in the world. He would be quite satisfied with that, he said.”

“Oh, he did!” the Bishop began, when Milner said, “Here he is now.” And turning, Anne saw Walford still standing near the head of the gangway. He hesitated for an instant before joining the group.

For some reason it embarrassed him to meet these three people together, perhaps because his temperament was sensitive and he was aware of a complex relation, somewhat incompatible and demanding different treatment. Dr. Milner turned to talk with Anne, and left Walford to explain to the Bishop how surprised he had been to learn of his connection with Mrs. Blythe and how deeply he appreciated and always should appreciate the kindness which the Bishop had shown him.

“And your resolution — does it still hold firm?” asked the Bishop, and suddenly remembered that he had desired Walford to say nothing on the subject to him till the eighteen months had expired.

“There is my man!” he exclaimed, glad of an escape from the subject. “He is mounting guard over my rug and steamer-chair. If you will excuse me, I’ll go and show him where to place them.”

As the Bishop moved away, Milner was making his adieu to Anne, and Walford took possession of the vacant place by her side.

“You are planning to be gone for a year.”

“Almost that, I fancy.”

“A year is a long time.”

“To look ahead, yes; but when we look back it seems a mere nothing—perhaps because all the unimportant things drop out.”

“And the unimportant people, too?”

“Yes; but it is hard to tell who the unimportant people are. Importance is such a variable quantity.”

“Can people make themselves important to you?” Walford spoke low and with a vibrant intensity.

“I must first of all feel that I am important to them.”

“Then I need not ask you not to forget me.”

“I shall remember you as long—well, certainly as long as the fragrance of these violets lasts.”

It was a deft allusion, for the flowers which she wore had been sent by Walford.

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“But in a year the fragrance will be gone, and the violets withered, and your friends perhaps forgotten.”

“Yes,” said Anne, with a smile of doubtful interpretation; “but then I shall come back, and I shall have a chance to find out your importance all over again. That is one of the delights of travel — to come home and rediscover one’s friends.”

Walford colored. He felt that he must open his heart to her; must tell her that when she came back she would find his place empty; that never again in all the world should they stand as they were standing now, face to face, eye to eye. Then there flashed before him that picture in the Blythe drawing-room, and he deeply comprehended the sensations of the young novice so soon to be dead to the world.

He gathered his courage and opened his lips to speak; but Anne had mistaken the motive of the silence he had allowed to fall between them. He thought her ungrateful for the sympathy that he had shown her. She could not go away leaving him under that impression. She raised her eyes full to his, and said softly: “I have more than violets to thank you for: I assure you I can never forget all I have owed to you in these last few weeks. I shall never cease to be grateful.”

“Don’t talk of gratitude, please don’t — not from you to me!”

Walford had moved closer to Mrs. Blythe as he spoke, and had taken her hand impulsively in his.

“Anne,” broke in the Bishop’s voice, “I want you to know Lady Hawtree Campbell. That is she talking with Mr. Fleming there by the railing. She and her husband are on board, with four of their daughters. They were very kind to me when I was in Derbyshire.”

“How many daughters have they left at home?” asked Anne, petulantly.

“Hush! they will hear you. That is one of them with the dog in her arms and her hair tumbling down.”

“Oh, is it? Well, why won’t there be plenty of time for us to meet on our way across the ocean? However, if I must, I must. Will you come too, Mr. Walford?”

“No; I’d rather say good-by now, though I shall wait on the pier till you are fairly off.” With this Walford touched her hand again, but more lightly, bowed to Bishop Alston, and was gone, Anne’s eyes following him until he was quite out of sight and lost in the crowd.

“By the way,” said the Bishop, “here’s a note for you. A messenger just left it with me.”

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Anne took the note and had no difficulty in recognizing the large commercial hand.

“DEAR ANNE [it ran]: It ’s a hustling day, and I may not get down to the ship, though I shall make a try for it. I send you a box of wine, with best wishes for a good voyage. May your boat never run her nose into the fog, or anything else except the dock on the other side!

“Yours with as much love as you will accept,
“T. R. YATES.”

“Poor Tom!” said Anne, with a deprecating shrug, as she thrust the note into her chatelaine bag and moved across the deck to Lady Campbell. Despite her annoyance at the interruption of her talk with Walford, she took one of her sudden likings to this badly gowned, well-looking Englishwoman with the charming voice and the restful absence of emphasis. Lady Campbell, on her side, was so pleased with Fleming that it required quite a minute for Anne to secure her attention, which, curiously enough, raised Fleming in that inconsistent young woman’s esteem. She turned to him with her most cordial manner and asked if they might not hope to see him on the other side.

“I have no such agreeable expectations at



“‘ANNE,’ BROKE IN THE BISHOP’S VOICE, ‘I WANT YOU TO KNOW LADY HAWTREE CAMPBELL.’”

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present," Fleming answered, "but every one does turn up over there sooner or later, and the winter winds often drive me to seek shelter somewhere from this pitiless climate of ours."

"We shall hope to meet you, then," Anne went on, "let us say in Rome, or, better still, in Florence. We expect to take a villa there in the spring and shall welcome any of our friends who will come. I shall spend all my time this winter learning enough Italian to speak with my maids. What 's that? The whistle?"

Fleming made hasty adieus and hurried along the gangway to the pier below, which had before been a scene of wild confusion and now had become all at once a section of pandemonium. Men and women threaded their way under the noses of the horses; boxes and barrels were thrown this way and that; ropes creaked, men shouted, tugs whistled. Then slowly the steamer moved out, the tugs hauled their lines taut, the huge stern swung round, and the voyage had begun.

Anne stood watching the mass of cheering, waving humanity on the wharf. "And all those," she thought, "are 'important people' to somebody." Her mood, however sentimental, was exultant. Was it not happiness of which she was going in search, and had she not money

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in the bank to buy it? The revolving screw pounded into Mrs. Blythe's ears a happy tune. It was the music of the future.

Meanwhile, among the throng on the wharf who strained their eyes to catch the last glimpse of the vessel, were three men whose thoughts were fixed on the slender, black-gowned figure at the stern.

"A year is a long time," thought Walford, with a sudden pang. "I wonder if she will remember."

"A year is a long time," thought Fleming. "Perhaps she will forget."

"Infernal bad luck!" growled Tom Yates. "I made a run for it; but there was a block and I was too late. I hope she got my note. Did she say anything about it, Fleming?"

"Not to me; but then I forgot to ask her."

The sarcasm was thrown away on the panting, perspiring Yates.

"I say, Fleming, will you breakfast with me at the Casino to-morrow about noon and go for a run in my 'bubble' afterward?"

"Thank you, yes. I'll go. I have nothing less dull on hand."

"Dull! I guess you've never been in my machine."

"No, but I have been in the machine of every

other man I know, and on each occasion I have spent several hours in the road holding tools, while the owner or his chauffeur lay on his back under the car, and then we have joyously taken the trolley home. Still, I 'll go. There, that 's all."

The steamer was out of sight, lost in the mist which hung like a veil over the lower bay, and the watchers on shore returned to their workaday world.

Through the remainder of the day Fleming carried in his mind the picture of Anne Blythe standing there on the stern of the steamer flushed and smiling. It came between him and the brief on which he was working, and would not be brushed away. For the first time he could imagine Mrs. Blythe softly human. It was easy to think of her as a woman to be admired; might it be possible to fancy her a woman to be adored? Not by himself, of course,—he was past all that,—but by some other man—Stuart Walford, for instance. He recalled distinctly the look in Walford's eyes as he waited there for Mrs. Blythe to turn. There was no mistaking its unconscious self-revelation; but Mrs. Blythe's manner, that was less easily read. He wondered vaguely why women found it necessary to be so much less simple and direct than men in their love-affairs.

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Was it that they must always stand ready to deny their love even to themselves if it were not returned ?

With Mrs. Blythe, he fancied, it was not any such reservation, but rather that, while willing to accept a devotion which would only add prestige to her present rôle of Queen of Fortune, she by no means desired to lay down her scepter.

The man who finds enjoyment in the incongruities of human nature has a vast fund of entertainment always at hand, and Fleming amused himself that evening by recalling all Mrs. Blythe's inconsistencies and the contradictions of her moods. At last, about midnight, it occurred to him that Mrs. Blythe had employed him to look after her legal affairs, not to be responsible for her spiritual condition.

"After all," he said to himself, as he turned off the light, "the key to her character will lie in what she does about the child. That will tell the story."

VI

A TRUST

“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

THE gayest place in New York of a summer Sunday morning is the little Casino, which sprawls like a turtle between the two Central Park driveways and refuses to be wholly hideous in spite of its roof of colored slate and its shapeless addition.

In the wistaria-covered pergola beyond, boisterous children climb the benches, to be pulled down at intervals by nurses neglectful enough until their little charges begin to enjoy themselves, when they interfere sharply and with the finality of brief authority.

In the court between the pergola and the Casino a line of motley vehicles is drawn up as if on dress-parade, so close together that the cabby on his hansom can talk with the footman on the box of the brougham. The incongruity of the equipages is no greater than that of their owners,

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who fill the tiled space in front of the building and look at one another across infinite spaces of differing experiences. The out-of-door restaurant is studded with small tables, and sheltered under a gaily striped awning from the heat of the sun. Altogether the place has a distinctly foreign flavor; this gave it a charm for Fleming. Moreover, the food is excellent, if one can possess his soul in patience for the cooking; this gave it a charm for Yates. And the two men therefore sat down in great comfort at a small table cozily niched between the wall and railing and overlooking the tiny plaza.

Yates ordered the breakfasts—a plain one for Fleming, whose taste was fastidiously simple; for himself an elaborate one, and such as did credit to his gastronomic imagination. When the waiter had gone, Fleming leaned back in his chair to take in the scene around him, the observation of his fellows being one of his cheap and constant amusements.

Yates looked up from the bulky folds of the morning paper. “‘Passengers outward bound may look for foggy weather till they reach the Banks,’ so the paper says. Hard luck for Anne! She was counting a lot on the voyage, but I’ll bet she is wishing herself ashore by now.”

"I am afraid so. How did the market close yesterday?"

"You can see for yourself," said Yates, pushing the paper toward Fleming's side of the table.

"Thanks; I never read the Sunday papers. I see no need of making a scrap-basket of my mind. But as you have been reading the stock lists for the last half-hour, I should be glad of your information, not to say your advice. Mrs. Blythe has asked me to keep her informed as to the values of certain stocks which are fluctuating just now, and I shall depend very much on what you think."

"Women have no business dabbling in stocks," observed Yates, with the easy generalizing of a narrow mind.

"Nevertheless, Mrs. Blythe, having several millions involved, seems obliged to 'dabble,' as you call it. What else can she do?"

"Marry!" said Yates. "Anne ought to marry and let her husband manage her millions."

Fleming was irritated. He resented the tone of Yates's speech. He resented Yates's speaking of his cousin by marriage as "Anne." His irritation lent a tinge to his manner as he answered:

"You seem to forget that if Mrs. Blythe marries she will have no millions to manage."

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"I don't know," said Yates. "She might marry *me!*"

"She might, and then again she might marry some one else; but in that case it would be within your prerogative to refrain from enforcing the terms of the will."

"Now, see here, Fleming, that's going too far. I make no secret of the fact that I would like to marry Anne Blythe. She knows it well enough, and I don't care who else does. But if she won't have me, that ends it; after that it's pure business. *You* can see *that!*"

Yates leaned his arm on the table as he went on. "I tell you the reason so many fellows don't get on is because they mix up sentiment and business. Sentiment's a good thing and business is a good thing; but they don't belong together."

"It seems not, certainly," Fleming answered nonchalantly.

At this point the long-delayed breakfast appeared and was set upon the table. As Yates took up his knife and fork he resumed his conversation.

"If a man wants to succeed he must keep his head clear for business and turn his life into cash. He must talk money, think money, dream money. And, after all, there's nothing like it."

“Nothing like it, perhaps,” Fleming answered, “but a good many things better worth having.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Well, I should be glad not to think so myself. It certainly has many advantages: in the first place, it’s so easy to get.”

“Is it, indeed?”

“Why, yes; you have only to make a lucky turn in Wall Street or lose a maiden aunt, and there you are. You can step out next day and buy your racers, hire your servants, order your wines, and be as good as any millionaire in the country; but, after all, what of it?”

“Well,” said Yates, leaning back in his chair and jingling the change in his pockets, “it may be as you say. Only, if it is, please tell me why the college presidents are all angling for money. Why are the churches tumbling over one another to secure a rich parishioner? Who is it that the dukes and princes want to see when they come over from the other side? I’ll tell you: it’s the men who have made their pile.”

“Perhaps,” said Fleming; “but there was a man named Abraham Lincoln who never made any pile except a pile of rails, and yet he seems to have amounted to something and to have found life worth while without money.”

“Well, there was a man named Anatole Jau-

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don who shot himself yesterday morning because he did not find life worth while without money."

"What is that?" Fleming exclaimed, dropping the lazy indifference with which he had been conducting the conversation. "What was that name you used?"

"Anatole Jaudon. Did you know him?"

"I have heard of him. What do you say happened?"

"He killed himself. Here is the account in the paper. You can read it for yourself, unless you are afraid of turning your mind into a scrap-basket."

Fleming took the proffered paper and read hastily:

Anatole Jaudon, formerly a lieutenant of the French army, killed himself yesterday at his boarding-house in Morton Street. For several years he had lived on remittances sent him by his daughter in France. Recently these had failed; but a week ago he received a letter promising money on Saturday. He rose early yesterday morning to watch for the postman; but when the carrier passed the door without stopping, Jaudon drew a revolver and shot himself. The carrier turned back as the shot was fired. There was a letter, with a double remittance. The body, unless claimed, will be sent to the morgue.

"Come," said Yates, impatiently, "stop reading! Finish your coffee and let us start. Shall it be Pelham or the Bronx?"

“What was that you were saying, Yates? Would I rather go to Pelham Park or the Bronx? I don’t know. In fact, I think I must give up both. I know friends of this Jaudon, and I ought to notify them before the body is carried to the morgue. Perhaps you will be good enough to take me to the elevated road.”

Yates looked at Fleming in surprise, then he sulkily ordered his automobile. He did not enjoy having his outing spoiled in this fashion. His annoyance found vent in the jerk with which he started his machine, and its headlong speed as he made the curve from the Casino to the main drive, and again where the drive intersects the cross-road below the Mall.

At this point he almost ran down a pedestrian, who saved himself by jumping backward. As he did so, both men recognized him, and Yates brought the automobile to a sudden halt.

“Well met, Mr. Walford!” he called out. “Fleming, here, promised to go with me on a drive; but he has changed his mind, and I am left all alone, like the girl in the song, unless you will take his place.”

“Thank you,” said Walford, who had not forgiven the indignity of his sudden jump, “but I have been called to see some one at the Presbyterian Hospital. I am on my way there now.”

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“Sorry!” said Yates, shortly, and started ahead again, at full speed.

Walford stood for a moment looking disapprovingly at the flying vehicle. He could not have explained why it struck him as more indecorous to travel fast than slowly on Sunday, and yet he felt that it was out of harmony with the tranquillity which should rule the Sabbath; and then to run people down like that was neither safe nor courteous. There was only one thing which could have tempted him to accept Yates’s invitation: that was the chance of hearing some word of a person who had been much in his thoughts of late, almost to the exclusion of all other thoughts, in fact. It is needless to say that the name of the person was Anne Blythe.

Anne Blythe! The words sent the blood coursing faster through Walford’s veins and set his pulses to beating. He seemed to see her again, standing on the deck of the steamer, his violets pinned at her breast, her eyes smiling into his.

Here a swift revulsion of feeling followed his elation. What right had he to be dallying with thoughts of love? No priest of the Roman Church could be more chained to celibacy than he. Could he for an instant imagine weighting himself with a wife in such a service of sorrow and death as lay before him? Even if, by a

wild flight of fancy, he could imagine himself taking a wife, was there a woman in the wide world so absurdly unfitted to the situation as Anne Blythe ?

He pictured himself telling her of his plans and asking her to share them. Memory showed him the deprecating gesture with which she had met his suggestion of mission work. He could fancy the ironical smile with which she would greet the unfolding of his schemes for the future. He should make himself ridiculous in her eyes. At this thought the hot blood flamed over Walford's face. Up to this time he had seen his mission only in the light of exalted self-sacrifice and solemn consecration. Now, of a sudden, he comprehended that it might strike practical minds as quixotic and fanatical.

With such emotions surging in his mind Walford took little account of distances, and it was almost of their own guidance that his feet stopped at the door of the hospital which rises big and bare above Park Avenue. Walford looked up at it uncomprehendingly for a moment, and then, suddenly recalling his errand, he pulled the bell sharply and asked to see the nurse in charge. She came to him in the little reception-room, and he told her as briefly as he could the story of his coming. A message had been

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received at the rectory saying that a very sick woman wished to see the rector, and Dr. Milner being absent, he had come as a substitute.

“Yes, I know; it was I who sent the messenger. A young woman was brought here yesterday suffering from collapse—not likely to live beyond to-morrow, we think. The doctor called it a case of heat-prostration, and the sun was very hot, you remember, yesterday.”

“Yes, I remember it well.”

“Of course that may be all that ’s the matter with her; but I think she ’s had some shock to her mind. She ’s been moaning ever since they found her wandering in the streets yesterday evening, and all night she was talking French by fits and starts. This morning she could give her name; but her heart is weaker. The doctor does n’t want her excited, but she begged so hard to send for some one that he thought it would be better to let her have her own way. First she wanted to see a Mr. Blair Fleming, but she could only give his office address. We begged her to wait and see him to-morrow; but she said she must see some one to-day, and after thinking awhile she asked, ‘Is there a Church of St. Simeon?’

“‘Yes,’ I said. ‘I was there once. I remember the candles.’”

Then, she said, she would like to see the rector; and she would give us no peace till we sent.

“What is the young woman’s name?” Walford asked.

“Renée Jaudon, and it’s my belief that she is related to the man who shot himself yesterday in Morton Street. But I must n’t keep you waiting. Will you come up with me now?”

Walford followed up the wide stairway to the open door of a ward where a line of white beds stood side by side in what looked, at first, like an endless row. The nurse pointed to a bed which seemed quite alone, because its neighbors had no occupants. Walford approached softly, watching a white face with closed eyelids. As he drew near, the eyes slowly opened.

“Monsieur is the curé, what you call the rector, of St. Simeon’s?”

The voice that spoke was weak, and Walford was obliged to lean over to catch the words.

“I am not the rector. He is away. I am his assistant. I thought I might be better than no one—at least, I could take a message. You will trust me?”

There was a note in Walford’s voice which was neither to be repelled nor denied.

“Trust you, monsieur? Oh, but yes, I trust you! I am going to die—is it not?”

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“You are very ill.”

“Yes, I know. I have been not good, and when the sun was so hot and I sank down in the street, I said, ‘See, Renée, God is angry against you.’ They lifted me up and brought me here. At first they thought I would get well; but God was angry, *et il n’y avait pas moyen*. Before I die there is a something I must do. There is a letter. I kept it back when I sold the rest. I might have had need of the money, and this would have brought it; but now that makes nothing. God is angry against me. My father is dead. I saw it in the paper yesterday. Will you give back the letter for me?”

“Surely I will, if you tell me to whom.”

The girl tried to sit up, but finding herself too weak, sank back on the pillow and gasped for breath; yet she laid a detaining hand on the sleeve of Walford’s coat, fearing he would go if she slipped into unconsciousness.

Walford answered as if she had spoken. “I will not leave you till you have told me all. Take plenty of time.”

At last she began again.

“I tried to see Monsieur Fleming.”

“Yes,” said Walford, striving to help her. “I know him. He is a lawyer. You wished to see him perhaps about some business?”

“Yes, it was that. He was kind, Monsieur Fleming, yet I had fear of him. He was so right! When I heard that he was not at his house, I thought, ‘Good; now there is no need that he know.’”

“Whose letter is it that you have kept?”

“This is why I sent for you: because I knew Madame Blythe went to monsieur’s church.”

“Do you mean Mrs. Richard Blythe?”

“*Oui! Oui!* It is for her. She hates me — I do not mind. She has fear of me — I am glad. But I forget.”

The weak hand moved upward to the pillow and drew out a folded sheet of paper, soiled along the edges and in the creases, as if with long carrying.

“For her!” the woman exclaimed, with the force of excitement in her tone. “Only for her! You will give it?”

“I will.”

“Not send — give!”

“I promise.”

“That is all. Thank you. *Au revoir.*”

The ghost of a smile trembled along the pale lips and was gone.

“The ten minutes are over,” said the nurse, coming up.

Walford took the dying girl’s hand in his.

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"You have my promise," he said. "Shall I come to see you again? When you are stronger, I might pray with you."

"No, no; I will have a priest of my own church. *Adieu, monsieur.*"

There were tears in Walford's eyes as he walked down the corridor and out into the street. The heavy door closed behind him. He looked up at the brick pile stretching from avenue to avenue, equipped with every life-saving apparatus, and he thought how little it all availed, how powerless, after all, was every human aid when death must conquer in the end.

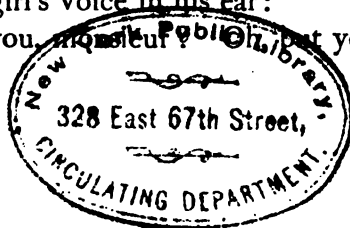
I say he thought all this. It would be truer to say he put himself through this course of thought, for all the time his subliminal consciousness was occupied with that letter in his pocket, against which his heart was beating heavily.

"Mrs. Blythe — what had this girl to do with her? 'Not good' — was not that what Renée Jaudon had said of herself? No; one could see that. The history of her past life was written in her face. How had this letter come into her hands, and what had it to do with Anne Blythe? Why had Mrs. Blythe bought the others? Was she afraid? Good heavens! Anne Blythe afraid? Absurd on the very face of it; and yet —"

Walford walked rapidly in spite of the heat; but when he reached Fifth Avenue he crossed the street and sank down on the stone bench from over which the head of Hunt keeps watch upon his work across the way. Walford sat vacantly staring at the mass of gray masonry. He seemed to see nothing, yet afterward he remembered every detail—the curving driveway in front, the high doorway, the bald windows, and the heavy cornice. Yet all the time his mind was hammering at the old thought: “What is it to Anne Blythe? How does it concern her?”

21099 He was aware that his forehead was wet. He drew out his handkerchief to wipe off the drops of sweat. As he did so, the letter fell out of his pocket and lay half open on the flags at his feet. As he stooped to pick it up, his eye almost unconsciously took in these words: “Yates is in love with my wife, and she —” Here the writing ended at the foot of the page. Walford turned white. Who was “my wife”? Did that refer to Anne? It spoke only of Yates. That did not in itself cast any reflection on her; but that broken sentence—he must and would know how it ended. Then he seemed to hear again the dying girl’s voice in his ear:

“Trust you, my dear, but yes!”



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Yet, he reasoned, this might be interpreted in another way. It might mean that she trusted him with full knowledge in the matter. How much more wisely he could carry himself toward Mrs. Blythe if he only knew — if he *only* knew! But no — he could not.

He rose, thrust the letter back into his pocket, and walked on faster than ever till he came to an opening in the stone wall which separated the street from the park. He entered and mechanically took a turn which brought him to a high rock topped by a summer-house under a spreading maple-tree. Here he sat down again, and again he resumed the mental struggle. This time he told himself that it would be wrong for him to go through life harboring a suspicion without foundation — a suspicion which might poison his whole life and blast his future; for he no longer attempted to deny that he held a personal stake in the character of Anne Blythe.

The riddle had been thrust into his hand; he had not sought it; but given the riddle, the answer must be read, or he should go mad. Indeed, he felt the veins of his forehead swelling in the heat, and he hastily loosened the tight collar which bound his neck.

The voice within urged constantly:

• “Read! Read!”

He resisted; he set his teeth; he shut his eyes; but still the voice went on: "Read! Read! Just one word—only one word!" At length, with a gasp, he drew out the letter, swiftly turned the page, and read: "*is like the rest of you.*" At the foot of the page was the name of Richard Blythe.

"I have been not good," the girl in the hospital had said; "and she is like you," Anne's husband had written. What did it mean?

Walford's education stood him in poor stead at this crisis. His sympathies were alive to any appeal; his emotions responded like an æolian harp to every gust of feeling; but his reason had not been trained to sift evidence, to weigh probabilities, to test statements. He was liable to accept hastily and without due consideration any conclusion which he either supremely desired or dreaded.

He instinctively saw life in high lights and deep shadows. It was easier for him to believe the worst than to hold his judgment in suspense, to wait and question Time, the great revealer.

Yet, even for him, it was difficult to plunge so suddenly from devotion to doubt. Anne's image was still set in that shrine where a man places only the woman whom he both loves and honors. He could not all at once cast it out.

But he asked himself how he should feel if this awful thing were true; how she would feel if she knew that he knew. It was too terrible to be considered, and yet he considered it. He began to picture her look when he handed her that letter. He framed the sentences which he would speak in answer to her self-exculpations. He half formed the prayers he would offer, the final absolution which his spiritual strivings should earn him the supreme privilege of extending. But oh for the perfect trust, the unconscious confidence of an hour ago!

“I — wish — I — had not looked,” said Walford aloud. He rose and walked unsteadily away, but only for a short distance. His feet faltered, and at the next unoccupied seat he sank down once more, and leaning his arm across the back of the bench, he bowed his head above it. Memory was busy with that first interview when Mrs. Blythe had poured out her confidences as a volcano pours out its lava-tide when it can no longer be held pent up. He wondered, in looking back, that his suspicions had not been aroused then. He ought to have seen how unnatural it was for a woman in her position to rush into such self-revelation; but if there were some guilty secret, not revealed, then he could understand how slight her confidences might seem to herself.

Was this the reason why her life with her husband had been unhappy? Was this why it had been such torture to hear his father talk of him? Was this why Mr. Blythe had kept her so closely at home, forbidding visitors? This would explain everything. And yet, if Mr. Blythe knew of it, why did he not cut off Yates in his will? No; clearly he could not have known who her lover was, but that there was one he did know.

The judicial attitude is lost when a man makes up his mind. After that he argues the case for his opinion, and has the same interest to prove his own wisdom that a lawyer has to prove his client's innocence.

Memory flashed more than one searchlight on the situation. Words, phrases, hints of remorse, to which he had paid slight attention at the time, rose before him now charged with a darker significance. Had there been an attempt on her part at a half confession, an appeal for sympathy without the humiliation of an avowal of her need? Alas, it looked only too probable. It fitted only too well with his reluctant suspicions. He should be a simpleton not to believe it. Yet he would hope against hope. He would give her every chance to explain it. He would place the letter in her hand and let her read it alone. Afterward he would question

her gently, as one who knows nothing. If she were guiltless, God knew how he would rejoice; if, on the other hand, she broke down, if she confessed her guilt, he would stand her friend, though his ideal might be shattered. He might still influence her. Through him she might yet be brought out of darkness into light.

“God grant it!” Walford murmured aloud, and brokenly repeated: “*I wish I had not looked.*”

VII

MAXWELL NEWTON

“Ihm ziemt 's die Welt im Innern zu bewegen,
Natur in Sich, Sich in Natur zu hegen.”

NEW YORK in July is like the circle in the Inferno where each man lives in his own particular little oven, and where the walls cast the red glare of their heat high on the clouds. But there is a worse torture reserved for those who fly from the city of Dis to its suburbs, whither foolish folk betake themselves in order apparently to escape all the conveniences of town while abating nothing of its heat.

Maxwell Newton lived on the north shore of Long Island, in a Maltese cottage,—one of a Maltese settlement squatted close together, for all the world like a family of gray cats,—at uneasy distance from New York, and reached with equal difficulty by boat or train. Newton's chief social pleasure lay in showing his house to his friends. The chief satisfaction of his friends

lay in the reflection that it did not belong to them.

On Saturday evening Blair Fleming alighted at the Newton cottage before the mosquito-netted porch which told its own story. He found himself eagerly calculating the number of hours which must elapse before Monday morning, and cursing the temporary glow of friendliness which had led him to accept Newton's invitation last week at the club. It was a weakness of Fleming's temperament that suggestion appealed to him so much more than fulfilment. He welcomed each invitation with a distinct thrill of anticipation; but when the occasion arrived, the bloom was off the rye, and he began to reflect on the comparative comforts and privileges of staying at home.

He was a confirmed bachelor, and a confirmed bachelor can make himself comfortable anywhere except in his friend's house. There he has deliberately put away the right to ring for everything he wishes, and he cannot swear at the attendants, at the moderate price of twenty-five cents an occasion, for not foreseeing and forestalling his needs.

It was of no use now to regret his room at the club, his window-seat in the dining-room, with his dainty meal ready and served to the instant

when it suited himself, not when it was easiest for the servants. He was here, and here he must remain for the coming thirty-eight hours and twenty-six minutes.

Newton stood on the porch mopping his forehead. "So glad to see you, Fleming! Seems pretty good to get out of that beastly heat, does n't it? George, take Mr. Fleming's suitcase to his room."

George was Dr. Newton's son, a long, narrow, tow-headed boy of sixteen, who had met Fleming with the dog-cart, and who now preceded him up the stairs and opened the door of an oven papered in yellow and looking out on a tinned roof.

"Would you like a bath?"

Decidedly Fleming *would* like a bath.

"Well, the bath-room is there at the end of the hall. You have to go through Father's and Mother's room to get to it; but you won't mind that."

"Oh, no, certainly not! But perhaps you will kindly show me the way, for fear I might fall into the clothes-closet or be shot down the chute to the butler's pantry."

To himself Fleming murmured, "I suppose I ought to think myself lucky not to have a sofa-bed in the hall."

Supper was cleverly placed at half-past six, in

order apparently to cut out of the day the two hours when strolling or driving might have been agreeable. The sun was slanting its last spiteful rays in at the scantily shaded windows of the sitting-room, happily combined with a hallway, when Fleming came down-stairs, immaculate and to the outer eye coolly comfortable in his fresh linen.

Mrs. Newton met him and introduced herself. She was not at all what Fleming would have expected Newton's wife to be. To understand men's wives one should know how they looked as girls, and that is often difficult. The Mrs. Newton of to-day had about as much individuality as a dish-pan, to which she bore some resemblance, being round and gray and monotonous. She welcomed Mr. Fleming with timid cordiality and then seemed suddenly to become afraid of the situation.

"I think," she said, "I'd better hurry supper a little. The country always gives people such an appetite!"

Fleming, who usually dined at eight, bowed his assent, and the little lady rolled away, leaving him at leisure to observe the room in which he sat. The furnishings were an unhappy combination of Newton's ideas of interest with his wife's ideas of beauty.

The chief ornament was a large walnut-framed

clock, which designated not only the hours, but the minutes and seconds, also the day of the week, month, and year, and with lavish superfluity indicated in the corner the phases of the moon and the date of eclipses. Next the mantel stood a spectroscope. A phonograph occupied the table, and in the window, taking up the only space where an easy-chair might have stood with its back to the light, was a glass tank filled with anemic fish and small uncanny reptiles. All these represented Newton. His wife, in the "pursuit of prettiness," had added certain easily recognized artistic touches — a sofa-pillow decorated with a picture of George as a baby, his yellow curls forming a charming contrast with the light-blue background, embroidered "tidies" representing a pathetic amount of misdirected industry, and a catch-all, made of satin ribbon and heavy lace, hung against the wall.

Fleming hoped that it would be possible to spend a great deal of time out of doors during his visit, and reflected with satisfaction that half an hour had already passed.

As he rose to walk to the door, his eyes fell on a pile of music, a violin-stand, and an open case. It was like finding an orchid in a cabbage-bed. How had such an exotic fallen into this Philistine world?

As if in answer to his questioning thought, the owner of the violin appeared at the door, and on discovering Fleming would have backed out again, but the visitor spoke to him.

"Hulloa, George!" he said. "Is it you who play?"

"Yes, I do, a little — very badly, you know. But I get a lot of fun out of it."

"You have had lessons?"

"No. Father won't let me. He says I'm to be a scientific man, and that a scientific man has nothing to do with fiddling."

"And you — do you wish to be a scientific man?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then why —" Fleming was beginning, when Newton entered and his son disappeared.

"Come, Fleming," urged his host, "you must see my laboratory before dinner."

The guest followed willingly enough down a long passage to a separate building containing a large, square room, much more admirable than the sitting-room. Places where people work are generally more esthetic than those where they consult their ideas of the beautiful. The useful is good enough in any household. It is reserved for the ornamental to be hideous.

Newton's study, to Fleming's mind, quite

atoned for the rest of the house and for the first time he could understand his friend's living here. A large table, littered with books, pamphlets, and papers, occupied the center of the room. Two or three easy-chairs stood around it. About the walls were shelves, filled on one side with books, above which hung a colored geological map of the basin of the Thames, showing the layers of chalk, weald clay, oölite, lias, and trias in shades of green and yellow.

Fleming drew near to the bookcase and ran his eye carelessly over the volumes which represented the only library of the house. They were, as he would have expected, entirely scientific. Not a poet was there, not a romancer, not a dramatist, not a historian. Everything was science. Fleming read the titles, confessing with some shame to himself that even they were unfamiliar and bewildering—Haeckel's "Perigenesis of the Plastidule," Büchner's "Matter and Force," Max Verworm's "Psychophysiologische Protisten-Studien." What effect would it have on a man's mind, Fleming wondered, to read this sort of thing and nothing else? Would he gain in concentration as much as he would lose by the exclusion of the humanities?

"Ah, you are looking over my books, are you?" said Newton's voice, as if in answer to

the questioning. "They 're food enough for a lifetime; but there are better things yet than books."

"Perhaps I did him injustice," thought Fleming.

"Yes," Newton went on. "Just look at the other side of the room!"

Fleming looked, and saw rows upon rows of glass vials filled with alcohol and containing "specimens"—a five-legged frog in one, an appendix in another, and then a succession of test-tubes containing a jelly-like substance and labeled "cultures." "*Bacillus typhi*" caught Fleming's eye.

"Pleasant!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, indeed; very," Newton answered. "I 'm glad you feel so. Some people don't; but I was sure *you* would take an intelligent interest. I should like to show you some of my experiments, if you 'd only stay over next week."

"Thank you," murmured Fleming, hastily, "but it 's quite impossible!"

"You know," Newton went on, scarcely taking in Fleming's response, "I am in the midst of an article for 'Pure Science' on the *Musca domestica*, or common house-fly, as a dangerous enemy of mankind. These are my material."

With this he opened the door into a sort of pen stocked with rabbits and guinea-pigs. "The ones in the cages have not yet been inoculated. Those which have been, and are under observation, are kept in a special hospital about a quarter of a mile away. Of course every precaution is taken; the dead animals are cremated, and there is no possibility of the communication of disease to human beings. Still people are so foolish about such things that I have thought it better not to mention my experiments to my neighbors."

"A wise precaution!" Fleming assented.

"Yes; caution is always necessary in dealing with ignorant prejudice. Now to an intelligent layman like you it would be a pleasure to explain my process. The flies are allowed to plant their feet in one of these 'cultures,' you see, and then their—"

"Excuse me!" interrupted Fleming. "It is of no use for me to pose as an intelligent observer. The fact is, I rather loathe the whole business. Would you object to coming back into the other room and shutting the door?"

"Why, of course, if you 'd rather," assented Newton; but his face fell.

Fleming, perceiving his disappointment, continued the conversation by asking: "Is this the principal work upon which you 're engaged?"

"No; oh, no," Newton answered, brightening a little. "My real work, the one that goes on year in and year out, is the study of cellular psychology."

"Is it really?" Fleming exclaimed, with a fair imitation of enthusiasm, secretly wondering what the deuce it was all about.

"Yes; I regard that as the greatest field open to the scientist to-day. It is at the very hub of nature's wheel, which goes whirling on, swinging from lifelessness through life back to lifelessness."

"Would you mind saying that over again? But if it's too much trouble, you need n't, you know."

"Why, you must understand! A child could see that—how the plant raises inert matter to the living world, while the animal destroys living matter and gives it back to the earth, and all the while the blind instinct of the imperceptible atom is in all and through all and the secret of all. You understand?"

"I'm sure you could n't make it clearer."

"Precisely. Then you see that, just as we take the material cell as the unit in the biological world, we must accept the cell-soul as the elementary unit in the psychological world."

"Now, see here, Newton!" Fleming began,

when the conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door and the announcement that supper had been ready for some time and Mrs. Newton said would n't they please come.

Fleming rose with alacrity. Newton, on the other hand, frowned and ran his fingers impatiently through his backward-falling iron-gray hair.

"Just the way," he muttered, "always the way! They wait till some one in the house gets his brain at work, and then they ring a bell or knock on the door, or raise some infernal racket—for what? To let him know that meat and potato are on the table. For Heaven's sake, why should hours for eating be so sacred, and hours for reading, thinking, or talking be broken in upon without apology!" Nevertheless, he rose and led the way to the dining-room, where George and Mrs. Newton were waiting, the former frankly hungry, the latter gently querulous and begging Fleming not to blame *her* if the soup were cold.

A silence fell as they took their seats, and Fleming had full opportunity to note the difference between the aggregation that makes a household and the congregation that makes a home. These three human beings had no more in common as a fund for spontaneous conversa-

tion than if they had gathered from the corners of the earth. Each threw down a gauntlet in the shape of a remark on a subject interesting to himself, but as no one took it up, no tournaments ensued, and the tilts were solitary canterers.

"The peas are late this year," was Mrs. Newton's first contribution to the conversation this evening.

Fleming responded that such peas as these were worth waiting for.

Mrs. Newton was glad he thought so and would n't he be helped to some more?

"Father," broke in George, who had been surreptitiously reading the evening paper which he held under the table, "they 've begun the summer concerts. May I go to the city to hear one next week?"

"No," said his father, shortly. Whereupon George bit his lip and looked as though if he had been a girl he might have cried.

Fleming felt sorry for him.

"Perhaps," he said, turning to Newton, "you will let George spend the night in town and go to a concert with me sometime."

"As you like," said Newton, indifferently; "but I can't understand George. Here, last month, when I wanted him to go to a meeting of the Geographical Society with me, he said

that no entertainment in town paid for the journey."

Fleming bowed his head over his plate to conceal a smile. As he did so, his eyes fell upon a fly making its way leisurely across the tablecloth. What if—awful thought—what if this fly had experienced a "culture"!

He strove to rid his face of all misgivings before he looked up; but he might have spared himself the trouble. Newton's mind was too preoccupied to take much heed of the expressions of his neighbors. He proceeded now unmoved with the train of thought which he had been following.

"That was an interesting man, that friend of yours whom I met at the club a month or two ago. I've come across him two or three times since. What was his name? Walden? Walworth?"

"Walford," said Fleming. "He is n't a friend of mine; only an acquaintance. Did you find him interesting?"

"As a study, yes."

"You were not drawn to him as an individual?"

"I don't say that; but I would not trust him, not in any enterprise which I had much at heart."

"I never doubted his honesty."

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“Not his honesty, perhaps, but his integrity, his whole-souledness, that is. His enthusiasms are too facile. He is too sensitive, too appreciative, too feminine. I find that the more an individual shares the peculiarities of the opposite sex, the weaker it is, the less chance of survival it has. I wonder, by the way, if Walworth—Walford is going to marry Mrs. Blythe.”

Fleming dropped his napkin and stooped to pick it up.

“Have you heard any such report?” he asked.

“I am not sure whether I have actually heard it or whether I formed the impression from seeing them together several times. On that day when she sailed, I met him coming off the pier, and he looked quite broken up. You’d have thought that he had said good-by to his last friend. That’s what I object to; he has no self-control, no governor to his engine.”

“Don’t you think Mr. Fleming would like to take his coffee on the porch, Father?” Mrs. Newton asked. She always called Newton “Father,” as if his only relation to her were through their child.

“An excellent idea!” exclaimed Fleming, glad to be rid of the heat and the flies and the subject of Walford.

George turned in at the door of the sitting-

room, and picking up the score of "Tristan," began to read it as he would read a novel. Mrs. Newton established herself with her embroidery under the light of an electric piano-lamp, and the master of the house, accompanied by his guest, strolled out to the porch, where Fleming seated himself on the broad, flat railing. Newton offered cigars; but Fleming drew out a pipe, which he filled lovingly, pressing down the tobacco with his thumb and first finger. As he lighted it, he heard a cough, a slight, dry, hacking cough which made him shiver. His older brother had died of phthisis, and he knew the sound.

"Who is that coughing?" he asked.

"Oh, that's George. He has formed the habit of it lately."

"Formed the habit of it?"

"Yes; it often bothers me when I am trying to study."

"But does n't it worry you?"

"It does a little. In fact, I sent him to a doctor here,—you know, physicians never like to tinker up their own families,—and Grey says it would be a good plan for George to go South or abroad, to Italy perhaps, for the winter. I can't see my way to it, and I dare say the boy will do just as well at home here, with the proper medicines."

“He is fond of the violin, he tells me.”

“Oh, he thinks he is—no genius for it; nothing that makes it worth while.”

“But if he enjoys it—”

“He must learn to enjoy the kind of thing in which he can succeed.”

“Has George a taste for science?”

“He will have—he must have. It takes time at first, of course, and much drudgery; but the reward is so immense that none except the dullest of the dull would stop to count the cost.”

“Might not the same be true of music?”

“Not at all. Music is only an amusement, with no intellectual element in it; at any rate, till we reach the grade of the composer. The musician, the performer on an instrument, is only a step above the clog-dancer. What a thing to give a life to!”

Fleming saw that further argument was useless. He puffed at his pipe in silence, watching the embers glow and darken in the bowl. In his heart he wondered how it could come to pass that there should be so little mutual understanding between those of the same blood.

At last, more by way of changing the current of talk than from vital interest, he asked:

“Have you ever regretted giving up the practice of medicine, Newton?”

“No, a thousand times no!” was the almost explosive answer.

Fleming murmured something about a noble profession, alleviating of human suffering, saving of human life.

“Ah, there it is!” Newton broke in impatiently. “We have grown to have such an exorbitant estimate of the value of the individual life. Where do we get it? Not from nature, surely. She makes short work of the individual who puts himself in the path of her laws. The physicians pride themselves on their success if they prolong for a few years the existence of Tom or Dick or Harry, when nature would have put them all out of the way to make room for better men. Oh, I ’m not finding fault with the doctors. I used to feel so myself; but I ’ve put all that behind me as a childishness. Why, merely on the ground of philanthropy, discoveries like those of Koch and Virchow and Pasteur and Jenner outweigh by a thousandfold any petty results of a tinkering doctor who gives up his life to taking care of a few old women; and as for the unfolding of great laws like those laid down by Darwin and Kepler, they simply open a new world to millions, widening their horizon, lifting them higher in the scale of sentient beings — that ’s the sphere of pure science.”

“Oh, if that 's the way you look at it!”

“To be perfectly frank with you, Fleming, that is n't the way I look at it at all. If you wish the real truth, I never think about human beings or their interests.”

“A strange mortal!” thought Fleming. “One is tempted to ask: If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love truth which he hath not seen? How can the abstract take such hold upon the soul as wholly to extinguish the personal, to drive out the consciousness of the individual which separates man from the brutes! Is it an advance or a retrogression?”

He continued this course of thought after the lights were out and he had lain down in his room, where he felt like one of the wretched folk in the city of Dis in their red-hot tombs with the lifted lids. Even they, he told himself, were not tormented with mosquitos.

Sleep he could not, and every now and then his ears were assailed by that dry, thin, hard little cough. “How long can this thing last,” he asked himself, “and how can Newton be so blind? It is as bad as murder to sit still and do nothing.”

Then he began to be afraid that if he thought of it any more he should try to do something about it himself. There he drew the line. It

was none of his responsibility and he would not make it so. He was planning to go away for a trip next winter, but he meant it to be a pleasure-trip. He certainly had no intention of escorting an invalid boy who was a *vicioso* on the fiddle; not he—no such fool. At this point Fleming turned, tucked in the mosquito-netting, and went to sleep.

On Monday morning he stood on the steps waiting for the dog-cart, which, like Vergil's robe to Dante, represented a blessed promise of escape. Quite to his own surprise, he heard himself saying casually: "By the way, Newton, I am planning to go to Italy next winter. If you'd like to have George go with me, just say so."

VIII

THREE LETTERS

“Black-and-white Angels of Revelation.”

ONE morning in the early autumn, Fleming found on his desk a letter bearing a French stamp. The handwriting told him that it came from Mrs. Blythe. He laid it aside and did not open it till the stress of the day's business was over. This was done partly as self-discipline and partly in order to convince himself that the contents had no special interest for him. Nevertheless, more than once he permitted himself to take the envelope between his fingers and endeavor to estimate the length of the letter by its thickness—a problem for which there is no mathematical formula. When at last he broke the seal he discovered with a satisfaction which he would not admit that the letter was long and closely written.

“DEAR MR. FLEMING [it ran]: The postmark of St. Malo on this letter does not indicate that we

live there, but only that we drive to that town to get and send our mail. We are traveling, or rather resting from travel, with Lord and Lady Campbell and their curious assortment of sons and daughters and dogs and men- and maid-servants. They let us alone as only English people can let you alone—that is, without prejudice to your attractions or their appreciation. The son, young **Hawtree Campbell**, is an agreeable man. He means to stand for Parliament next year—all because we have been twitting him with his idleness. I am rather sorry, for I like to have people stay in their type, and his type is emphatically that of the leisure class.”

Here Fleming laid the letter down on his desk, and smoothed the open page mechanically. “Now, why does she write that to me?” he asked himself. “Mrs. Blythe is too clever to introduce the creditable anecdote for its own sake. If she wishes me to know that **Hawtree Campbell** is in love with her, why not say so and let it alone? She need not be afraid of my repeating it.”

Fleming, you see, judged a woman’s motives by a man’s, and thereby fell into many and grievous errors.

“I wonder [the letter continued] how you would adapt yourself to the lazy life which we

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are leading here. Could you content yourself with strolls on the beach, crunching mussel-shells under your heels, or with drives along the cliffs between borders of funny, stubby grass, or watching the sun dip into the ocean to the west of us? That is the thing to which I cannot grow accustomed over here, finding the Atlantic always on the wrong side. If you were here, and brought your logical mind to bear, I dare say I should come to understand that we do not carry our horizon line in the trunk when we travel. If we could only get rid of our mental horizon as easily! Every day I realize the truth of Lady Kew's saying that we belong to our belongings; and once in a while, once in a very long while, I feel as if I should like to be rid of mine, and travel about like the artist who is sketching under my window, with no impedimenta but his kit and his umbrella.

“I have discovered in myself the meanest jealousy—not of what people have, but of what they are. All the time while I am watching my artist I am thinking: “Oh, dear, I wish I could do that!” After all, though, should I be satisfied with such an impersonal life? Would any woman be satisfied with it? I suspect I should weary of it in the end. It is the influence of my individuality which interests me. Better be the

inspiration of the painter—Andrea del Sarto's wife, for instance, if she had had the brains to appreciate his art, or that Mona Lisa who smiled her crooked smile on to Leonardo's canvas! But a man would n't feel so — would he?

“Here I am forgetting that you are a busy lawyer whose time is of value. Therefore to the purpose of my letter, which is to acknowledge your letter and to inclose the proxies for which you ask. I shall trust to your judgment entirely. The rubber stock I prefer to hold, even at the risk of loss. Perhaps you will send me a stock-list. I have not seen one for a long while.

“Now I come to that part of your letter which is hardest for me to answer, and so, like a coward, I have put it off till the last. I ask myself: ‘What shall I say of Renée Jaudon's death?’ Whatever sentences I frame sound either brutal or hypocritical. I am not sorry that she is dead. I am not. I am *not*. After all, you know, why should I be, except as it makes the question of the child more importunate? At the end of the year I suppose I must come to some decision about that; but I am fully determined not to burden my life with this responsibility which Fate has tried to thrust upon me. The child's very existence is an insult to me. His presence would be a perpetual reminder of all that I most

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wish to forget. You do not know what it means. You cannot, or you could never have said so calmly there on the deck of the steamer that we must forgive in order to forget."

"Did I say that?" thought Fleming. "What a prig I must have been! It sounds like the top line of a copy-book."

"I, at least, can neither forgive nor forget at present [the letter went on], therefore I can only ignore, and this child is a stumbling-block in even that path. My idea is, if possible, to find some decent person who will adopt the boy and bring him up in ignorance of his parentage. This will be the kindest course toward him. No, perhaps not that, but the only possible one for me. I recognize no obligations on my part beyond those of common charity.

"My uncle is calling me to watch the Breton women gathering seaweed. They are a picture in their tattered, bright-colored petticoats against the white sand and blue sea. We shall be here for another month, and after that it will be safest to address me in care of my bankers. I am glad that there is a prospect of your running over this winter. If we meet in Rome, remind me to tell you of a compliment that my uncle paid you the

other day. I must tell you also of his comment on my portrait, an etching by Rajon.

“‘Anne,’ he said, ‘you have not really much intellect or such good looks; but the clever people think you good-looking and the artistic people think you clever.’ I like my picture because it is a happy blend of the two deceptions.

“Yours sincerely,

“ANNE BLYTHE.

“P. S. If you see Mr. Walford, please tell him that Hawtree Campbell is anxious to read his last Easter sermon; if he has kept the notes perhaps he will let me borrow them.

“A. B.”

“H’m,” said Fleming, pushing aside the page, “so *that* is the solution of the riddle. It is Walford who is to know about Hawtree Campbell. Perhaps; but not through me.”

The week after receiving this letter from Mrs. Blythe, Fleming wrote an answer inclosing the stock-list for which she had asked. It so chanced that the same steamer which carried his letter carried also a letter from Stuart Walford. The two were brought at the same time to Mrs. Blythe as she sat with Lady Campbell at the base of a cross set up by the pious Breton peasants on the edge

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of the cliff, a few rods from the red-roofed inn. Anne turned the letters in her hand, and at sight of "St. Simeon's Parish House" in the corner of one envelope she flushed so high that Lady Campbell noticed it and said considerately: "I think I will explore the cove down below there while you are reading your mail."

"Very well," Anne assented. "If there is anything of interest, I will read it aloud when you come back."

When she found herself alone she threw Fleming's letter lightly on the grass and tore open the other envelope with quick, nervous fingers. As she read, her brows drew together in a puzzled frown and her breath came short.

"You were good enough [Walford wrote] to grant me permission to write to you when you went abroad. I have tried several times to begin a letter; but it was difficult. My life here is absorbing to me; yet it has very little material of general interest, so if I write it must be of the inner and not the outer world, and more of you than of myself. I often think of our talks last spring. They meant a great deal to me. You said once that I helped you. The words linger in my memory and give me courage for what I am going to say."

Here several words were erased, as if a sentence had made a false start and trotted round the track for a fresh one.

“My object in writing now is to beg you to trust me [the letter went on] if you should ever find yourself in any trouble requiring sympathy or counsel. I know that you have the wisest spiritual guidance close at hand; but we cannot always lay bare the deep things of our lives before those who stand nearest us, can we? That sorrow is only half a sorrow of which we can speak freely.

“Yet it does not do to lock our hearts utterly, lest we shut out the Holy Spirit when it comes to strive with us. I sometimes think that our church made a fatal mistake in breaking with the sacred tradition of Rome which offers her children the spiritual sanctuary of the confessional, where the burdened soul may lay down its load, sure of a listening ear, a sympathetic heart, an eternal silence.

“Forgive me if I have said too much! I could not say less, remembering as I do the look in your eyes on that day when we first met. I shall never forget it—I cannot—I do not wish to.

“You will answer this, will you not? and tell me where your winter is to be spent. A task

has been assigned to me which is likely to take me to Geneva in the late winter or the early spring, and nothing shall hinder me from finding you out if you are in that part of the world."

Walford's signature followed, and so the letter ended. Anne read it through twice, then folded it slowly and slipped it meditatively into its envelope, after which she leaned back against the great cross, clasped her hands about her knees, and sat staring at the line of islands rising blue to the northwest. "What does it mean?" she asked herself, and found no answer.

We take enormous risks when we send off letters to our friends. The mood of the reader is so little to be foreseen by the writer! Our trifling jests fall on breaking hearts. We fill pages with our swelling emotions, and they are scanned by eyes of cynical amusement.

Walford's letter left Anne baffled and bewildered. What could it mean? At length, after her mind had wandered through puzzled mazes for a long while, she began to feel that she had hold of a clue. It must be that to Walford's life of strenuous self-sacrifice her self-indulgence took on the aspect of crime, and he felt that he must break down the barriers of conventionality and deliver his message of warning. She re-

spected him for that, though she thought it might have been done with something less of solemnity—less of the manner of the Hebrew prophets.

Her vanity was wounded by the constraint of the letter and by the lack of that something which had marked his bearing on the steamer—something as impossible to explain as to mistake, the *tutoiement* of manner underlying indifferent speech. Moreover, the ascetic ideal which Walford represented struck a chill across the warm expansiveness of Anne's mood. She shook her head wilfully like a Shetland pony, and turned to Fleming's letter.

“MY DEAR MRS. BLYTHE [Fleming wrote]: I understand your desire to hold the rubber stock; but you must remember that all industrials are uncertain. However, it was agreed before you left that I should assume no responsibility for your individual investments, but simply act as your agent except where I act as trustee for the estate. The proxies I have and shall try to use for your best interest. I inclose herewith the stock-list for which you asked.

“Yesterday I received a report from the Sisters of St. Clara. Renée Jaudon's child has been ill, but is recovering. Will you be sorry, I wonder? They seem fond of it, and it is not

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impossible that they will be willing to undertake the charge for another year. That is all my news.

“Your wind-swept cliffs are a pleasant contrast to my close office, where the electric light burns all day and sheds a circle of sham sunshine over my desk. I take great credit to myself for not being more envious than I am; but there are always compensations. I, for instance, am too busy to be bored — and you?”

Anne looked off from the letter, and her eyes fell on Lady Campbell, wandering along the beach, picking up shells of which she intended to make a picture-frame as a souvenir of St. Malo. Mrs. Blythe had thoroughly appreciated the companionship of these kindly, well-bred, well-placed English friends; but she realized with swift compunction that in the matter of interest there might still be something to be desired. “Mr. Fleming would be more agreeable,” Anne decided, “if he were not a clairvoyant.” Then she read on:

“I shall soon have an opportunity of testing my own power of enjoyment as an idler. We sail by the Southern route late in January. I think I wrote you that George Newton is going

with me. As he has a little cough of his own, we shall loiter about Naples and Capri for several weeks and shall probably reach Rome about the time when you are leaving.

“I was much interested in what you say in your letter of the difference between a man’s ideals and a woman’s.”

“What did I say about ideals?” Anne questioned; but not being able to remember, she continued reading:

“I certainly do not know many men who would be contented to be the inspiration of another man’s work. It is too passive a form of achievement to appeal strongly to the masculine mind. As to ‘the influence of one’s individuality,’—was n’t that your phrase?—I fancy most men would rather be known through their work than through their personality. For myself, I thoroughly agree with Montaigne that one is never so well off as in the back shop; but then one must have been in the front shop first to appreciate it, and, moreover, neither he nor I ever looked at life from the standpoint of a beautiful woman.

“Shall I see your portrait if we meet in Rome? I hope so. And of your mercy, Gracious Lady,

do not play upon my vanity by asking me to remind you to repeat the Bishop's compliment. Dispense it affably and without taking notice of my confusion! I dearly love flattery, but not at the time of its administering. I prefer to drag it up my winding stair into my dismal den, and there, like the spider, to gloat over it unobserved.

"My respectful regards to your uncle, whom I have admired from the moment of our meeting (true, by the way), also to Lord and Lady Campbell; but not to their son: I have a notion that I should not like him — I don't know why.

"Yours very sincerely,

"BLAIR FLEMING."

Anne was still smiling when she looked up to find Lady Campbell quietly sitting near her on the grass.

"My letter is from Mr. Fleming," Anne said. "He is my lawyer. He sends his regards to you and Lord Campbell."

"I should like to see him again!" Lady Campbell exclaimed cordially. "He is not only a gentleman but an interesting man." Then she added, after a reflective pause:

"I don't wish to say anything nasty about the States; but when we were over there we did not find your gentlemen your best specimens. My

husband was tremendously impressed with your workmen—they were so intelligent and all that, don't you know. But as you go higher and look for more, you often don't get it."

"No, you don't!" Anne admitted candidly, and then added: "As for Mr. Fleming, you probably will meet him again if you go to Rome with us. He speaks of being there when we are."

Lady Campbell raised her eyebrows questioningly.

"Oh, no," said Anne; "he is not in love with me. He admires a very different type of woman. I suspect that his most complimentary adjective would be 'discreet.'"

"That word does not exactly describe you, I admit."

"Thank Heaven, it does n't! Discretion is a mean combination of second-rate virtues. I'd rather wear my heart on my sleeve and have it fairly riddled with daw-pecks than to keep it under glass like a French clock. Shall we go in?"

Lady Campbell noticed that Mrs. Blythe had not fulfilled her promise of reading her letters aloud, and she drew her own inferences. They strolled in silence across the moorland stretching between the top of the cliff and the inn, which

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boasted a gilded monkey hanging before its doorway, and rejoiced in the name of *Le Singe d'Or*. The dry grasses crackled beneath their feet, the mellow autumn air blew softly against their faces. Anne took off her hat that she might feel it stronger on her forehead.

"I wish to be good," she said at last, breaking the silence. "But I should hate to be *too* good. As far as I can see, the better you are the less comfort you get out of it. I mean to keep a firm hand on my conscience if I find it growing too sensitive."

Lady Campbell laughed. "Here comes Hawtree," she said.

IX

UP AT THE VILLA

“What of a villa? Though winter be over in March by rights,
’T is May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well off the heights.
You ’ve the brown plowed land before where the oxen steam and wheeze,
And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint gray olive-trees.”

“**M**Y dear Anne, whenever you feel that it would relieve your mind to say something, *don't say it!*”

Bishop Alston and his niece had been traveling together for ten months, and the Bishop had arrived at a tolerably clear understanding of Mrs. Blythe's character, at least in its superficial phases. This remark was the result of his observation. They had been talking of Eunice Yates, who, like them, was spending the spring in Florence, and who had just sent a note saying that she should come up to take tea with them. This afternoon tea was a pleasant thing as Mrs. Blythe served it on the terrace of the pink-stuccoed villa on the slope of the Fiesole hill. The slant

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sunlight fell across the red roofs of the city, reducing them to a ruddy blur, through which the shaft of the Campanile and the burly cube of the Palazzo Vecchio rose solid and tangible. Beyond, the distance softened into the terraced heights of San Miniato.

Anne had just returned from a drive and still wore her black-plumed hat and black gloves, which with her white gown made a combination too effective to be missed by the most obtuse mind, and Anne's mind was not obtuse. At present, however, her attention was fixed, not upon the gown, but on her uncle's words. She pondered with intently knit brows while she fed bits of bread from her plate to a black bird perched on the carved back of her chair. It was a mina-bird, and the mina-bird, as every one knows, was made by Mephistopheles in a moment of mockery. It outranks a parrot in cleverness as a parrot outranks a canary, and makes its living by scoffing at the human beings around, till they are fain to stop its mocking mouth with titbits. Such a genius did the bird possess for voicing the inmost thoughts and lighting upon the secret weaknesses that Mrs. Blythe, who had bought him of an English sailor at Naples, straightway changed his name from the Indian one he bore to "Conscience."

"I must say it," said Mrs. Blythe, still looking at the bird over her shoulder. "It is like steam gathering in a boiler—the longer I keep it shut up, the bigger the explosion when it comes. If I could just once speak out from the shoulder —"

"A mixed metaphor, my dear."

"Never mind. If I could once say, 'Eunice, you are a fraud. You know it, and I know it,' we might go on being friends; but as to eternally accepting her valuation of herself, her false invoice of her own virtues, I can't and I won't."

"Can't and won't," echoed Conscience.

Anne laughed.

"After all," said the Bishop, "she deceives no one in the long run."

"No; but in the short run she does. She deceives me in spite of myself. When I hear that she is in the drawing-room, I say to myself, 'Now, mind, don't believe a word she says to you,' and before I have been with her five minutes she is molding my opinion of people and things, and I find myself taking up her prejudices, which, by the way, she discards promptly whenever they are likely to cause her any annoyance."

"Anne, your dislike of Eunice Yates is excessive — positively morbid. What is the secret of it? What lies at the root of it all?"

“Chiefly, I think, the excellence of her motives. They are too good. They pass the bounds of human credulity, and so we earthworms, who cannot grasp such transcendent virtue, begin to grope about to find less worthy ones and fit them to the case. Now, for instance, here is Eunice’s note to-day. She says that she has not been able to sleep on account of her sympathy with my headache yesterday. She has heard at the *pension* of a remedy, and if I don’t object she will come up and bring it this afternoon.”

“Now, even you cannot deny that that is a kindness, Anne.”

Mrs. Blythe crinkled her eyelids till their lashes met, and shook her head.

“You do not perhaps remember my opening a note the other day when she was here. You made some inquiry about it, and I told you that it was from Mr. Walford, that he was staying in Florence for a few days, and that he asked if I were to be at home this afternoon. You went on to repeat all that Dr. Milner had said of Mr. Walford’s success and popularity.”

“Ah!” said the Bishop; but he was not thinking of Eunice Yates. His eyes were fixed upon the rising color in Anne’s face, and he noted a slight tremble in her voice as she spoke. He had not been oblivious of the interest with which

his niece had listened to every passage in Milner's letters mentioning Walford's name, or of the pleasure with which she had heard of his rapid advancement. How much of this interest lay on the surface and how far its roots ran into the depth of feeling he was unable to discover, so he waited. Few men understood so well the art of waiting. Regarding himself as the custodian of Walford's secret, he did not feel at liberty to give any hint to Anne, or even a caution not to bestow her heart upon a man pledged, in a sense, to make no return.

His reflections were interrupted by the tinkle of the bell at the iron gate, and a moment later the servant appeared, followed closely by Stuart Walford, who advanced toward Mrs. Blythe with a constrained smile. Its conventionality belied the flush on his face and the high excitement of his eyes. The color was reflected on Anne's cheeks, and more than the common welcome dwelt in the ring of her voice and in her quickly extended hand.

Bishop Alston was struck by the change which these ten months had wrought in Walford's appearance—a change none the less convincing because indefinable. Was it that the ascetic line of his cheek had acquired a shade of fullness, that his eyes took in more and gave out less,

that his manner had gained in accustomedness, in the air of the world, or was it only the closer cut of the hair, the better tailoring of his clerical coat? Such small things go to make up the totality of an impression!

For a moment Walford was wholly absorbed in the vision of Anne as she stood there in her white gown; he held her in an intense gaze as if he sought to fathom her very soul; then suddenly he turned and caught the Bishop's eyes fixed upon him.

"This is an unexpected pleasure!" he exclaimed. "Dr. Milner told me that you were going back to America on the 1st, leaving Mrs. Blythe here for the month."

"I was," replied the Bishop, "but circumstances changed my plans."

"The more fortunate for me!" rejoined Walford, with what the Bishop considered unwarrantable glibness in addressing his superior. He preferred the embarrassment of last year. The Bishop never showed himself tenacious of his dignity unless some one failed to recognize it.

"Indeed," Walford went on, "I was so uncertain in regard to Mrs. Blythe's movements that I thought it best to come here at once instead of stopping at Geneva, where I was bound for the Conference of Missions."

“Ah!” said the Bishop, with the falling inflection which tells of satisfied interrogation.

“What is this conference?” Anne inquired with specious interest. In reality nothing was further from her thoughts, which were wholly occupied with speculation as to the meaning of Walford’s coming. “Before you begin, though, let me give you your tea, unless you prefer going into the house.”

“Oh, please not! Remember I come from a region where we don’t sit out of doors at this time of the year, where we don’t have a scene like this spread out before us at any time.”

“Very well,” assented Anne, leaning back in her chair as she softly moved the samovar and lifted the cups with her delicate fingers.

Walford began to feel the old bondage stealing over him. For the moment he yielded himself wholly to its charm.

“And the conference?” suggested the Bishop.

“The conference,” Walford answered with enthusiasm, “is really the finest thing of the century. Fancy all the denominations coming together to compare their methods of mission work, to study the needs of the heathen in the uttermost parts of the world, to consider what form of religious teaching reaches them best and why, and to consider, too, what we have to learn from them!”

“What is the standing of the Church as compared with the sects, in mission work?” the Bishop asked.

“Oh, we stand well up in the ranks; but our converts seem to be less affected in the matter of changing their way of life.”

“I’m not surprised,” the Bishop assented, balancing his spoon absently on the edge of his cup. “It is true in civilized countries as well. The *laissez-faire* of the Church attracts but does not compel.”

“And you, Mr. Walford,” broke in Anne, impatient to end the theological discussion, “what part do you take in the conference?”

“I am to give a paper on the condition of the Hawaiian lepers and their spiritual needs. It is a subject which has interested me for a long time.”

Here he cast a sidelong glance at the Bishop, who received it imperturbably.

“Goodness, what a ghastly theme!” murmured Anne, with a shrug of her shoulders. “Leprosy is so hopeless! If the lepers can find any comfort in sin, why not let them? Don’t you think it’s rather cruel to add a sense of responsibility to their other burdens?”

“Oh, Cousin Anne!” exclaimed a soft voice from behind her shoulder. Anne scarcely turned.

“That you, Eunice? Let me present Mr. Walford,—Miss Yates. You heard part of our talk evidently.”

Walford, rising, faced a slender girl with a smooth sweep of hair, and eyes of a sweet, serious gray. The eyes met his with an understanding and sympathy which went far to console him for the shock caused by Mrs. Blythe's words.

“Yes,” said Eunice, placing her profile between Walford and the view, while she spoke to Anne, “I heard, and was so interested I could not bear to interrupt. I know Mr. Walford by reputation already. I hoped that he was going on to tell something of those poor lepers and of that lonely life of theirs.”

“Eunice, you 're a fraud!”

The voice that uttered these words came from the black imp in the shape of a bird, which had forsaken the back of Mrs. Blythe's chair for a perch on the balustrade. His words sent a shock through the entire company. Anne blushed. Eunice looked at her with reproachful comprehension. The Bishop fingered his spectacles uneasily, and Walford fairly started from his chair.

Mrs. Blythe was the first to recover her composure.

“You must not be surprised by any bit of

folly or impertinence from this bird of mine, Mr. Walford. He speaks 'an infinite deal of nothing.'

"Does he ever say anything of his own, Cousin Anne, or does he only repeat what he hears?"

Anne did not find it convenient to answer.

"I trust, Eunice," she said, "that you have come to say that you will sing at the musicale to-morrow evening."

"Yes; that is, if you will be contented with that 'Ave Maria.' You know, I don't sing secular songs."

"So you told me," Anne assented nonchalantly.

As he watched the warmth of Miss Yates's manner and the chill of Mrs. Blythe's, Walford felt a bewilderment stealing over him like the fog which rises where the Gulf Stream meets the Labrador Current.

"No," Eunice continued, with dreamy eyes fixed on the distant hills. "For others of course it may be right; but for me, my singing is only a way of speaking to the heart, so I would have it speak of the highest things, and of those alone."

She turned and smiled softly at Walford, who looked at her with a quick little nod of assent.

"A beautiful nature!" thought he, and noticed with a painful contraction of his heart the indifferent shrug with which Mrs. Blythe greeted the

remark. Had she grown so hardened that she ceased to respond to noble words like these? He could not bear to think it, and yet he told himself that he was prepared for anything. His mind had traveled over a long road in these past ten months. The windings had been devious and the guidance uncertain. The thought of Anne's guilt, which had cut him to the soul at first, had grown familiar. He had not lived so long in the metropolitan world without realizing how frequent such things were. It had long ago ceased to seem impossible; it was rapidly ceasing to seem improbable; and yet he had not stood in Anne's presence five minutes before he felt the return of her old empire over him, and he was consumed with a wild desire to confront her with the letter, to demand the truth, to know the worst or the best at once.

Even now his pulses thrilled as he heard his name spoken by her voice. So quickly did his heart beat that he scarcely caught the substance of her words; but at last he gathered that she was telling him of the musicale. It was to be the next afternoon—very informal; but one or two artists had promised their services, and Miss Yates was to be the star.

“Miss Yates sings very well, I assure you. I hope you will come to hear her.”

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Walford bowed his thanks and assent. In a pause he turned to the Bishop, who had been studying the young clergyman as closely as Walford had regarded the two women.

“I don’t think, Bishop Alston,” said Walford, “that I quite understand what you were saying just now about the Church attracting rather than compelling.”

“Ah,” thought the Bishop, “he is afraid that I am going to ask him about himself. He need not fear. I shall learn all that I need to know and more without the brutality of the direct question.” Aloud he said:

“There are two views of the Church — the sacramental and the institutional. In common with many broad-churchmen, I incline to the latter view. To my mind, the Church of England is the best religious machine in the world. Her task is harder, in some respects, than that of the Roman Church, for she deals with men who can cut the connection at will, and yet she keeps her hold on them generation after generation. And how?”

“By offering to take their religious thinking off their hands,” said Anne, whereat Walford decided that she was flippant, and of a flippant woman what might not be true? His vague suspicions returned in full force.

The Bishop received the remark calmly.

“Not altogether that,” he answered mildly. “The people in any sect who really *think* must always be numerically insignificant; but there is nothing of which men are so jealous as of their right to think if they should ever take a fancy to do so. Now the Church is strong just here in her combined firmness and elasticity. For her thinkers she has her reserves in store, the best and wisest of all her provisions, the right of private interpretation. Of course we got it from the Jesuits, and they, for all I know, from the Roman augurs, and they from the Egyptian priests. Be this as it may, the device works to perfection. If the Westminster Catechism were ours it would give us no trouble. The catechism asks: ‘What is the chief end of man?’ The old theologian would answer: ‘To glorify God and enjoy him forever.’ The modern rationalist would translate this: ‘To glorify Good and enjoy it as long as I live.’ Then they would go on comfortably together.”

“But does not this private interpretation encourage doubt?” ventured Walford, who had observed a respectful but dissenting silence.

“Very likely; but the people who as believers have no doubt in their minds, as skeptics would have no mind in their doubts. They are the least valuable part of the community.”

“ ‘Faith is a passionate intuition,’ ” said Eunice Yates, rising as if she were pronouncing a benediction. The others rose too.

There was a moment's pause. Eunice broke it, saying: “I had a letter from Tom at Monte Carlo this morning. He arrives to-night.”

Walford looked at Anne; but her manner of receiving the news told him nothing.

“Tom is enjoying Monte Carlo, and he detests Florence; but he is coming merely to be with us.”

“He is a devoted brother,” volunteered Anne, amiably.

“He is a devoted *everything*,” Miss Yates replied inscrutably, and then turned to walk toward the gate with the Bishop.

Walford remained standing with Anne, who followed her cousin with a “Till to-morrow evening, then, Eunice, and I will send the carriage.”

The young clergyman gripped his hat tightly, as was his habit when embarrassed.

“Mrs. Blythe,” he said at last, “I stopped in Florence and came here to-day to see you on a special errand.”

The color flashed up to Anne's brow and retreated. Her eyelids fell till their lashes lay long and shadowy on her crimson cheek. “Yes?” was all she said.

“I promised to place a certain letter in your hands — a letter which I did not dare to trust to the vagrant Continental mails. I have it here.” And thrusting his hand into his breast-pocket, he handed Anne an envelope addressed in his own writing.

“A letter!” exclaimed Mrs. Blythe, opening the wide astonishment of her glance full upon him. “How mysterious! And do you happen to know its contents?”

If a bomb had exploded under Walford’s feet he could hardly have been more confounded. Up to this time he had pictured Mrs. Blythe in almost every attitude: confessing her guilt, begging for his sympathy, or flaming into indignation at the calumny; but this smiling, casual question suddenly changed all rôles. How was it that he had never thought of this?

“Why — I — I — that is, Mrs. Blythe, I cannot explain now” (seeing the Bishop coming toward them after escorting Miss Yates to the gate). “But would you be good enough to give me back the letter till I find a chance to explain?”

“Give you back my mysterious letter? Oh, impossible! How high you rate a woman’s self-control, or how low her curiosity! I’ll tell you: I will read the letter first and hear your explanation afterward. You say you have read it already?”

A man with less principle would have lied ; a man with more experience would have evaded. Walford could do neither. He strove to plunge into the depths of self-exculpation, only to be caught in the eel-grass of self-consciousness.

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Blythe —” he began.

But at this critical moment the Bishop rejoined them, and Walford was obliged to take his leave without even an appointment for an interview.

As the iron gate closed behind him Mrs. Blythe rose from her chair and walked to the balustrade, which ran the length of the terrace. She leaned upon its broad top. Her gaze swept the hillside, with the valley at its foot and the narrow pathway which wound precipitously from highway to highway, cutting off half the distance for the pedestrian.

“Yes,” Anne said at last, “I thought so.”

The cause of this remark was the sight of a slender figure in gray, seated on a slab of old yellow marble placed close to the path for the benefit of wayfarers, in a clearing which gave a wide view of hill and valley. The gray gown, as Anne instantly noted, belonged to Eunice Yates, who with raised arm and extended finger was pointing out the beauty of the landscape to the stolid Italian maid at her elbow.

In a few minutes another figure, tall and black-

coated, wound its way through the trees and reached the bench. Then the gray figure rose, and the three went on down the hill together.

“Cleverly done, my lady!” exclaimed Anne, half aloud. With a not wholly genial smile, she turned and began to pace the terrace back and forth, striking her lips softly with the envelope which she held in her fingers.

X

IN WHICH WALFORD LEARNS

“ Our faults no tenderness should ask,
The chastening stripes must cleanse them all ;
But for our blunders,— oh, in shame
Before the eyes of Heaven we fall ! ”

THE architect of the Villa Piacevole had built it of white stucco, with a loggia and a vine-covered pergola. A terrace bounded by a marble balustrade lay in front. Its steps led down to the garden, which was Mrs. Blythe's particular pride, and laid out, as befitted an Italian garden, in delightful stiff little walks hedged with box, and leading nowhere. In one corner a Roman amphora leaned forgotten against the vine-grown wall. At the head of the garden, beneath a clump of ilex-trees, stood a stone bench fashioned after one in the Boboli Gardens. It had no back and was far from comfortable, yet Anne had a strange fancy for it, and sat there dreaming away long hours in the still spring

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afternoons, breathing in the fragrance of the plum-trees, and watching the faint silvery green of the olive slopes.

But the thing which most often attracted her eye was a sun-dial of yellow marble, brought from the ruins of an old Mantuan villa, and set up afresh here in Fiesole. Around the dial-plate was carved a ring of cupids, and twisting in among them ran a line from Dante :

“L' amor che muove il sol e l' altre stelle.”

Anne looked at it so often that at last it sang itself in her memory, and she liked the dial the better for the inscription's sake. Yet she did not wholly accept its burden, and sometimes wondered as she looked : “After all, *does* love move the sun and stars or even this earth of ours ?”

On the afternoon of the musicale, Walford walked up the hill leading to Mrs. Blythe's villa, past gray walls hung with creeping vines, pausing every now and then to look at the scene behind him, as if unwilling to face what lay before. The terrace was alive with people when Walford reached the villa. He had already learned through his New York experiences to avoid the dull first hour of a function. Moreover, he had his own reasons for preferring to

arrive with the crowd. Now he and the samovar presented themselves together just as the sun was preparing to take his leave and making his bow over the shoulder of the hills.

The candles were lighted in the delightfully bare, sophisticatedly simple salon, and their twinkle contrasted oddly with the diffused sunset glow on the terrace. For a few moments Walford stood still, neglecting to seek his hostess, and interested in taking in the company as a whole before speaking with those whom he knew here and there.

It was a curiously mixed assemblage. The American Ambassador to St. Petersburg, having given himself leave of absence for a few weeks in Rome, now loitering on his way back to his post, was talking in a corner with Bishop Alston; Lord and Lady Campbell were explaining the view to their daughters, the Honorable Beatrice and the Honorable Virginia, who received the information with an upper-crustacean languor. A rich California woman, recently divorced and soon to marry an Italian count, presided at the samovar.

The polyglot conversation carried on among some Russian and Roman artists floated about Walford's ears, now blending with, now rising above, the strains of the Brahms Hungarian

dances played by a trio in the salon. As Walford looked and listened, the scene struck some vibrating chord in his memory. Once more the picture in the Blythe drawing-room rose before him. He could see the little novice in her white veil, the candles twinkling like those within, the crowd of bejeweled bystanders, and the sad sisterhood waiting to receive the newcomer. Strangely enough, the scene seemed to blend with the one before him; but in place of the golden-haired girl, he saw *himself*, his life about to be stripped of all that made its charm, and sacrificed — yes, he might as well call things by their right names — *sacrificed* in that lonely island of a distant sea.

He shook off the unwelcome thought, and turned his eyes to the center of the terrace, where Mrs. Blythe stood. Tom Yates hovered beside her, and awaited his chance to secure her attention. Anne was at her best. Her color was high, her eyes bright, her voice low, but filled with a ripple of laughter.

Walford had his own reasons for not joining the group around Mrs. Blythe too hastily. Had she read the letter? If so, what were her emotions, and what were her feelings toward the man who had read it also? He was sure that her manner would tell him something. He felt that

he would rather not receive the information in public. So he simply stood still and watched her; yet her spell lay on him more heavily than on any man in the group about her. A knowledge of soul-secrets tells both ways.

Walford studied Yates closely, but learned little from the scrutiny. His manner was devoted, certainly, but not beyond that of the other men, and there was no suggestion of mutual understanding. Still — here Walford's wandering gaze rested on the familiar figure of a man lounging in the doorway, playing with his eyeglasses, and regarding the company with critical aloofness through lazy eyelids. It was Blair Fleming, as Walford saw at a glance, and beside him stood a half-grown lad listening with eagerness to the melancholy, delirious music. "Oh," Walford said to himself, "I remember now to have heard that Fleming was spending the winter in Rome on account of Newton's invalid son." Here he caught Fleming's eye, and crossed the terrace, bowing in passing to his hostess, but scarcely pausing for more than the bow of greeting.

"Ah, Fleming," Walford exclaimed, with the genial manner which had won a score of parishioners for St. Simeon's, "this *is* a pleasure! Who would have predicted, when we lunched

together at the Fifth Avenue Club last spring, that our next meeting would be in Florence ?”

The touch of professionalism in Walford's tone annoyed Fleming.

“Who could ?” was all he said in response.

Fleming was one of the few men who can drop a subject without breaking it. Walford felt his effusiveness checked. He was irritated thereby, and was impelled to a remark of the unwisdom of which he was fully aware, or would have been had he not been completely off his mental balance as the result of a sleepless night, spent in wrestling with an unsolvable problem.

“Have you seen Yates here to-night ?” he asked in a constrained tone.

“Yes.”

“Curious that he should have deserted New York at the busiest season of the year — a man so absorbed in business as he !”

“We have all done it, it seems.”

“Then you have no suspicion as to what brought him ?”

“If I felt enough interest in his movements to attempt a reason for his coming, I should say that his sister's presence was reason enough.”

“Still, I suspect he had another.”

“Very likely. Mixed motives are common to mankind.”

"I think he is in love with Mrs. Blythe."

"More than probable," Fleming assented coolly.

"I think that he has been in love with her for years," Walford rushed on, maddened by the calmness of the other man. "For years," he repeated — "before her husband's death; and that she returned it."

Fleming's stare of blank amazement infuriated Walford still further. All night he had been going over yesterday's interview with Mrs. Blythe, and always with a growing sense of mortification, and an intolerable consciousness of wounded vanity. Fleming's cool contempt drove him mad.

"You can afford to hear me calmly," he cried, "for you have known it all along."

Fleming put on his glasses, tilting his chin upward a little as he did so, looked at Walford for a moment, and then said quietly:

"Mr. Walford, if you have any common sense left — use it!"

To himself he wondered: "What can the man mean? Does he realize what he is saying — that he is making such an accusation as this against a woman whose guest he is, and to another guest, at that? Surely he was not such a cad a year ago."

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Fleming, like the rest of us, judged a man by results, without taking the pains to follow processes. Could he have traced the workings of Walford's mind through these ten troublous months, he might have had more comprehension and therefore more tolerance.

Walford opened trembling lips to reply; but he was interrupted by a murmur, "Miss Yates is going to sing," followed by a general movement from without toward the doors and windows of the salon, where Eunice Yates sat with her harp against a background of dark wood.

The gold-framed triptych above her head was matched by the fillet in her hair. The flowing sleeves fell back and left her arms bare. The square, gold-embroidered neck of her gown left her throat likewise bare, and like her arms it was as white as snow. "St. Cecilia," said some one, and then another said, "Hush!" as the white hands swept their first chord and the pure soprano voice began Gounod's "Ave Maria."

When the song was over Eunice Yates had won her place. The women congratulated Mrs. Blythe on such a protégée. The rich Californian asked if Miss Yates sang for money, and the English girls wiped their blue eyes and tried to say something and could not.

The Bishop, after handing a cup of tea to the

wife of the Ambassador, settled himself comfortably in a portly arm-chair and turned his spectacled glance in the direction of the singer. Walford was talking to her, leaning his arm on the top of the harp and bending over in an attitude of devotion. A smile which in a worldling might have been called cynical dawned on the Bishop's face. "How much easier to coddle out zeal than to crush it out!" he murmured under his breath.

Two other observers were taking in the tableau of St. Cecilia. Mrs. Blythe and Fleming stood side by side, a little apart from the company on the terrace. From their corner they had an uninterrupted view of the brightly lighted salon, of which Eunice Yates was for the time being the central figure. For some moments neither spoke. At last Fleming observed:

"How well they suit each other!"

"Not in the least!" answered Mrs. Blythe, with decision.

"Well, now let us see," said her companion, with an air of judicial calmness. "They are both handsome — you admit that."

"Yes, I admit that."

"Both have charm — magnetism — call it what you will."

"Ye—e-s."

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“You speak doubtfully. You don’t, perhaps, feel Mr. Walford’s charm.”

“Oh, he! There is no doubt about *him*, I should say. It is Eunice about whom I hesitated. I realize her power, I see others swayed by it, and yet, for my life, I cannot help holding back and analyzing it, and in the end resenting it.”

“Curious!” said Fleming. “That is precisely the way I feel about Walford. But there’s another point in common which will be sure to draw them together. They both have such high aims!”

“You don’t really believe in Eunice’s sentiments?”

“Do you in Stuart Walford’s?”

Anne looked down, and began to pull to pieces the rose which she held in her hand. “If you had asked me that question ten months ago,” she said at last, “I should have resented it. Then I thought Mr. Walford the noblest man I ever knew. If you had asked it last week I should have argued, refuted, rebelled; but I should have listened. To-night — I don’t know — I think,” she said, flushing suddenly rosy red — “I think I am awfully near being in love with Mr. Walford; but something holds me back. I tell you all this because you let me make a sort of father confessor of you there in Rome.”

Fleming was silent for several moments. At length he said: "I am not surprised. Walford was sure to appeal to a woman like you — certainly at first."

"He did—he does. But I have learned a great deal—of myself, among other things—in these ten months, and—and I don't take people so much at their face value. Sometimes I wish I did. When Mr. Walford wrote me that he was coming to Florence and coming to see *me*, I felt—I can't tell you just what I felt; but it was excitement, anticipation, and pleased vanity, and perhaps—something a little deeper. I'm afraid this is boring you."

"Assume that it does n't bore me, please, and go on."

"Well, before I had been with him half an hour I realized that he was changed in some way. He was more polished, and all that, than a year ago; but he did not seem like the same man."

"How?"

"He had lost the dignity of simplicity without attaining the distinction of a man of the world. He was more self-conscious, bent on making a good impression on my uncle and letting him know what a success he was making; but, besides that, he seemed to have lost his

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frankness, to be keeping something back, and the old expression was gone from his eyes when he looked at me. Somehow, distrust seemed to have taken the place of the old friendliness and sympathy."

Fleming remembered Walford's words of a few minutes ago, and felt that he might, if he would, shed a flood of light on his behavior to Mrs. Blythe. He only smiled, however, and said:

"Perhaps the old feeling was not merely friendliness, and that is what 's the matter."

"I have thought of that," said Anne, simply, "and I think, in a way, it is true; but it does n't account for his manner."

Fleming let a long pause fall. Then he said calmly:

"If I were you, I would let Eunice Yates have him."

"But I want him for my salon. He 's such good material."

"Would his devotion to Miss Yates interfere with that?"

"Oh, yes; he would n't care to come if he were n't a little—well, a little interested."

"Then I am to understand that the salon is to be made up exclusively of people who are 'a little interested.'"

"No, not exactly, because then we should miss you, and you count for something."

"Yes, that would certainly shut me out," said Fleming, with a smile that dislodged his glasses. He readjusted them with two fingers.

"No, Eunice cannot have him," said Anne, returning to the charge; "at least, not yet. He may not be all that my fancy painted him, but he 's much too good for her."

"Fleming, judge, dissenting," commented her companion, stepping back as Lady Campbell came up to speak her adieus to her hostess.

"Yes, my dear," said Lady Campbell, "we are off in a fortnight. I shall be quite too awfully sorry to say good-by to you; but remember you are to give us a week at the Hall in the autumn. I shall ask the jolliest people we know to meet you."

Anne murmured some response and walked toward the steps with her guest, leaving Fleming alone. He turned his back to the company, and strolled to the edge of the terrace. Fixing his gaze on the bulk of the *Duomo*, he began a very plain talk with himself.

"Sir Jackass,—whose other name is Blair Fleming,—it is not your fault that you belong to the ancient and honorable order of Donkeys. That you can't help; but it is still in your power

to be an honest donkey, and not to commit an act which would cause you to hang your head and bray with shame for the rest of your life. Ask *her* to marry *you*? Asinine is no word for it. ‘My dear Mrs. Blythe, would n’t you like to give up several millions of dollars, a house on the Avenue, and what your poor little imagination conjures up as social celebrity, for obscurity and a side street with a man of forty who has neither achieved greatness nor had it thrust upon him?’ Sounds well, does n’t it? Bah!” And Anne, would she not think—had she not perhaps already thought—that in the first interview after Mr. Blythe’s death, when he advised her to come to some sort of compromise with the Yateses, he had thoughts of entering the lists himself; that there was greed underlying his counsel? Oh, humiliating, degrading, disgusting! That way madness lay. And yet to let her marry Walford without an effort to prevent it!

He strode hastily across the terrace toward young Newton, who sat crouched in a corner of the salon, oblivious of his surroundings. “George,” he said, “it is time for you and me to be leaving. Come along and say good evening to Mrs. Blythe.”

“Not quite yet, please. Could n’t we wait just ten minutes? Perhaps she will sing again.”

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“ ‘She ’ being Miss Yates, I suppose.”

“ Of course.”

Fleming good-naturedly assented, and stood over the boy, leaning against the wall.

“ Mr. Fleming —”

“ Yes, George.”

“ Do you think she would let me thank her ?”

“ I advise you to risk it. I ’ve known a good many artists, and I never saw one become violently indignant at a respectful expression of admiration, or ‘appreciation,’ as they call it. Come over, if you like, and I ’ll present you now. Miss Yates, here is a young man who wishes to thank you for past favors, and is trying to screw up courage to ask for more.”

George stood by with blushing ears, looking like a tortured sheep, till a sibylline smile from Eunice put him sweetly at his ease.

“ You sing perhaps yourself ?” she asked.

“ No ; oh, no ! I only scrape a little on the violin.”

“ Ah, that is better ! A violin does perfectly and steadily what the voice does only imperfectly and uncertainly. A violin may take cold and grow hoarse ; but it never breaks down from excess of feeling. I am afraid I could not sing again to-night ; I have felt too much.”

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George was in an agony at the thought of having forced so intimate a confession from such a being, but Fleming took the situation quite composedly.

“It seems audacious, after you say that, to urge you further, and yet I am impelled by the prospect of being kept awake by the plaints of this young cormorant. Is n't there something in your music-roll which makes less demand on the voice and on the emotions than the 'Ave Maria'?”

“Since you wish it, Mr. Fleming,” Miss Yates answered, with a delicate emphasis on the pronoun, “I will try. Yes, my music-roll is in the corner. Perhaps Mr. Newton will bring it.”

Eunice's voice flattered. It made her words of secondary importance.

George was in the seventh heaven of delight, and further transported by the look with which Miss Yates received the music-roll. He felt himself not only drawn within the circle of a beautiful woman's intimacy, but made one of the glorious company of musicians, the preëminent society of the world.

Miss Yates left her harp and stood by the piano. The accompanist glanced over the music and struck a few chords. Then Eunice began:

“Angels, ever bright and fair,
Take, oh, take me to your care!”

With the first notes the leave-taking crowd halted, turned, and trooped back to doors and windows. The rendering was not as finished as in the "Ave," but there was a vibrant sweetness, a simplicity, which touched the heart more. George Newton half expected that her white-robed sisters would come at her call, to bear her out of his sight forever, and even Fleming caught his breath and wondered if Anne might not be a little prejudiced.

When the song ended, George gave a long, gasping sigh, as if he were coming to life out of some ecstatic trance.

"Come, my boy," said Fleming's voice in his ears; "you have heard enough now to dream of o' nights for a month. We *must* be going."

The lad assented, nothing loath. What was there worth staying for longer?

So Fleming and his charge slipped out with the departing throng, which lessened rapidly till all were gone except Eunice Yates, slowly donning her wraps in the dressing-room; her brother, explaining the merits of his new touring-car to the Bishop on the terrace; and Walford, who hesitated in the doorway.

"What a supreme actress that woman is!" he thought as he caught the brilliant smile with which Mrs. Blythe sped the last of her departing

guests. To have just learned that her secret was discovered, that it was in the possession of one of the men about her, and yet to bear herself with this gay nonchalance — it was incredible. And yet, suppose her innocent? Then, to throw off the accusation so, as a mere nothing, argued a levity worse than guilt. No, however he looked at it, Anne was hopelessly lost to his esteem. But there still remained a problem of some interest, and that was how did *he* stand in *her* esteem? The moment for the test had come, and he determined to learn whether she had forgiven him — whether she ever would forgive his stripping off her mask.

Slowly he drew near to where she stood under the full blaze of the Venetian chandelier. She was superb to-night. He almost wished that he had put off the tragic moment; but it was too late now for regrets. Mrs. Blythe had caught sight of him, and as he approached she drew from the folds of her dress the letter which he had given her the day before.

“See!” she exclaimed, as she held it up gaily. “Honor and a sense of gratitude have held out so far; but curiosity is storming the citadel. I have not opened the letter yet; but if you have explanations to offer, prepare to shed them now.”

Walford was still smarting under the contempt

in Fleming's voice, and he was aware of a strange contradictory feeling that he could almost wish to see this woman before him humiliated. Her confession would be his justification. He had thought about this thing till his mind was warped and he could see nothing straight. Besides, what real explanations had he to offer for having read the letter? Perhaps the best excuse would have been to tell her that he loved her and had been driven half mad with jealousy at the words on which his eyes had fallen. But he could not go into all this here and now; and even if he could, it looked like a poor shelter.

"Go on!" he said with dry lips which failed pitifully in their effort at a smile. "Never mind the explanation! After all, it is of no consequence. Read the letter! I had it from a dying woman, and one may look for truth there!"

Anne felt her heart beat heavily. Something in Walford's voice told her that this was no jesting matter, and yet she could not step so easily from the social surface gaiety to the tragedy of real life. With the smile still on her lips, she opened the envelope addressed to her in Walford's handwriting and unfolded the sheet.

"From Dick!" she exclaimed. Her hand trembled; her cheeks paled. Breathlessly she read on to the foot of the page, then turned the



'NO!' THUNDERED VATES BRINGING HIS HAND DOWN HARD."

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IN WHICH WALFORD LEARNS 175

leaf, and never faltered till the close. At the end she looked up, and her eyes met those of Tom Yates, who chanced to be entering at the door.

“Read that!” she said. “It is from my husband to his mistress.”

Yates took the letter in some bewilderment. His face darkened as he read, and his lips moved, but uttered no word. Anne’s eyes never left his face. When he had finished, she said simply:

“Was it true? Did you care for me, then?”

“I did, Anne. I could n’t help it.”

“And did you ever say or do anything which could have led me to suspect how you felt?”

“Before God, *no!*” thundered Yates, bringing his hand down hard on the edge of the malachite table.

Anne extended her hand.

“Very well, Tom.—Is that all that you wish to know, Mr. Walford?”

Mrs. Blythe swept a courtesy of dismissal to Walford, who stood silent and dazed for an instant, then bowed low enough to hide the mortified crimson of his cheeks. As he withdrew he saw her take Yates’s hand in both hers and heard her say:

“Thank you, Tom. Thank you for not telling me—and thank you for caring!”

XI

FINE ARTS

“ He feedeth on ashes : a deceived heart hath turned him aside.”

IT is a long distance from the Fiesole heights to the Accademia delle Belle Arti; but to Tom Yates it looked only too short in prospect, for Anne Blythe had promised to traverse it with him, and he was waiting impatiently in the little salon for her appearance. It was not strange, perhaps, that he should have built high hopes upon the warmth of her manner to him on the night of the musicale. It is hard for a man to realize that there is often a *tertium quid* to be reckoned with in considering a woman's manner, and that that third something is her calculation of its effect upon some other man.

Another thing which he could not be expected to take in by intuition was Mrs. Blythe's motive in assenting at once and cordially to his suggestion of this walk. In fact, it was a very compli-

cated motive, and might have resolved itself into several. In the first place, she wished to talk with him alone and uninterrupted. In the second place, she wished at once to let down the situation from the plane of high tragedy on which the scene of the musicale had left it. In the third place, she thought Walford might still be in Florence, and she wished to show him that she defied his interpretation of her conduct. Finally, she thought that it would be endlessly diverting to see Tom Yates wandering among the early Tuscan painters. Poor Tom! As I say, he could not know all this, and so he sat in the salon of Mrs. Blythe's villa, in great satisfaction with himself and the world, awaiting Anne's entrance.

The mina-bird perched in equal content upon a gilded pedestal in the corner and surveyed Yates, with his head cocked on one side in droll imitation of the way in which Mrs. Blythe carried hers, and a diabolical acuteness shining in his beady black eyes. Every once in a while he burst into a hoarse uncanny cackle, which for some reason Yates found extremely disconcerting.

Anne entered the room, wearing a gown of gray corduroy, with a bunch of jonquils at her belt, and gloves of yellow chamois leather. It

was the first touch of color that Yates had seen her wear since her husband's death, and it unconsciously raised his hopes; but the mina-bird's ominous croaking still lingered in its exasperating persistence.

"Anne," Yates remarked, strolling in the direction of the gilt pedestal, "what would you say if I wrung the neck of that black bird of yours?"

"Say? I should say that I quite understood the feeling which led you to the deed,—in fact, I have often experienced a similar impulse myself,—but I should also say that the execution of the intent was injudicious. 'Conscience' is under the protection of the infernal powers, and if you succeeded in destroying the mortal part of him, his astral body would haunt you, and 'sendings' of impalpable black-winged things would appear in your room at midnight."

Again the croaking laugh from the perch.

Anne and Yates laughed also, and walked slowly toward the door, Mrs. Blythe buttoning her gloves and Yates carrying her yellow-lined gray parasol.

As they descended the hill in the direction of the Porta San Gallo, Tom looked down with approval at Mrs. Blythe's low shoes, stout without clumsiness, and loose without bigness. "I am glad, Anne," he said, "that you brought over

enough American shoes to last. They don't know how to make them over here."

"No," said Anne, indifferently; "I don't think they do."

"Nor anything else, to my mind."

"Oh, I can't go so far as that."

Yates rejoined with a querulous accent: "What you find over here to fall in love with, I cannot see. There 's the Pitti [Yates pronounced it *pity*]. Don't it look just like Sing Sing prison? Now tell me honestly if it don't remind you of it."

"It does a little, perhaps," Anne admitted candidly; "but then I think our prisons are the best buildings we have."

"And these narrow streets—do you like these too?"

"Why, Tom, it is n't the buildings, nor the streets, nor the pictures, nor the music, though I do care for them all in a way that I don't suppose I could make you understand. It 's all of them together, and, more than that, it 's the way of living. Here, for hundreds of years, people have been at work building up a delightful life for me to live. Now, why should I throw away these advantages and go over to America to help build up the same kind of life for people ten or fifteen generations away?"

“But it is so clean over there.”

Anne laughed.

“Yes, it is clean, and I like to be clean. That’s why I took a villa instead of going into one of the old palaces; but when I have once secured a little circle of cleanliness, with a bathtub in the center, I don’t care about the rest of the world. In fact, I like it a little dull and worn. I grow tired of the new brass at home. There’s old Tommaso’s shop, for instance, in the Via Porta Rosa. You have n’t seen it? Well, I’ll take you there sometime, and show you brass that is brass, all green in the creases, like Stilton cheese, and with lovely vines and satyrs winding in and out everywhere. And, oh, the little back room! That is best of all, with its altar candlesticks and its *bénitiers*. You buy them before you think, and then you wonder how you’re going to get them home, and what you’ll do with them after you do. That’s one of the delights of Europe.”

“It’s not that, Anne, you know it’s not; for only the other day you told me that you hated *things*, and that shopping was a punishment invented to make the rich more miserable than the poor.”

Anne laughed a second time.

“What is it, then, that makes me love Eu-

rope? You tell, since you seem to understand my sensations better than I do."

"It's the people."

"Perhaps it is. I had n't thought of that. Look there!"

Tom turned and saw a pretty child, with eyes as black as sloes, and braids to match, dancing on the pavement, the yellow shawl knotted about her waist showing bright against the green of her short skirt. As she caught sight of them standing and gazing, she threw redoubled energy into her dance and shouted, "*Buon giorno!*" as she waved her hand toward them.

"Yes," said Anne, "I believe it *is* the people."

"I'm blessed if I can see why. I looked round at your musicale, and thought how badly dressed all the women were."

"Very likely. They don't have to make their position by their dress, as we do. But the men—you must admit that they have more distinction than those you'd meet at a tea at home."

"I don't know; I did n't notice the men particularly. Anne, have you given me a thought since you've been over here?"

"Yes, indeed, Tom; I've given you two this very morning."

"And am I to hear what they were?"

“ You may, if you wish, though I am afraid you won’t care for them.”

“ Tell me, anyway.”

“ Very well. First, then, you were drinking last night.”

“ Now, how in thunder do *you* know that ?”

“ Not by any Sherlock Holmes intuition, I assure you. I simply heard you asking my butler if there were any bottled soda in the house. Bottle soda in the morning means a good deal, as I learned to my sorrow in those years with Dick.”

“ Was the other thought equally pleasant ?”

“ No, not quite.”

“ Then in Heaven’s name tell it and have it over !”

“ Shall I really ?”

“ Go on.”

“ You have been playing heavily at Monte Carlo, and lost —”

“ Anne, I *will* wring the neck of that black bird of yours. You send him out at night to prowl about and bring you back bad news of your neighbors. You know you do.”

“ I had n’t thought of that before. It would n’t be a bad plan. Thank you for suggesting it. In this case, however, I did not need Conscience’s services. Your letter to Eunice told us that you

were at Monte Carlo. I knew that you did not go there without playing, nor play without plunging. As for losing, you would never have come away so soon if you had not lost."

"Yes, I would — to see you, Anne."

"No, no; my society would keep, and a run of luck would n't."

"You 're awfully hard on a man. I 'm not such a bad fellow, though of course I 'm not good, like you and Eunice."

"Don't bracket us together like that, please; I 'm not good like Eunice, either."

"You don't care for Eunice, do you?"

"Not particularly."

"She does for you, though."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, she says she loves you, though you *are* selfish and frivolous, and she prays for you every night."

"Does she? Well, I wish she would n't. She 'll just prejudice God against me, with her little insinuations and her damaging petitions. But never mind Eunice now. The reason I spoke about Monte Carlo was to ask if I could n't lend you some money. I 'd love to do it."

"Now your imagination has run away with you, as it does with every clever woman in the end. Why, it was only a matter of a few thou-

sand. It was n't the money at all that troubled me; but I'm not accustomed to lose, and I don't like it."

"I have known that for a long time. You are an ambitious man."

"I don't know. I have only two ambitions in the world—to make money and to marry you."

"But if you married me you would not need to make money."

"Oh, that is a woman's way of looking at it. Your fortune would only be a beginning. In five years I would double it; in ten years you would be the richest woman in America."

"In the first place, I doubt whether you could; in the second place, I should not care if you did. It would not interest me in the least to be ticketed as the richest woman in America, any more than the tallest woman, or the woman with the longest hair. I don't care for money in itself. I like the ease and luxury and exclusiveness; but I could not buy any more of them with ten times my fortune. There is a limit, you know, and I have reached it."

"But don't you see I'm the only person you can marry without giving up all these things?"

This was a false move. Anne answered with a slight upward motion of her head.

"That is a matter about which you need give

yourself no anxiety. At least I shall have the satisfaction of feeling that if I marry some one else, my loss is your gain."

It was really unworthy of Anne Blythe, and she knew it as soon as she had spoken; but there are some people whose obtuseness makes them as responsible as ourselves for our brutalities. When a man cannot be made to feel with a needle-point, who is not tempted to try a gimlet?

When Yates spoke again it was sullenly. One knew how he might speak to his wife ten years hence.

"You need n't have said that. It was n't very nice in you."

"Nice? No, I should say not. It was horrid, perfectly horrid. But don't you see how we irritate each other, and if it's like that in one short morning walk, what would it be if we tried passing the whole of our lives together?"

"But I love you, Anne. Does n't that make a difference?"

Yates looked so abjectly miserable that Anne felt a pain at her heart.

"Yes, it does, Tom. It makes me awfully fond of you. And then you're so honest and outspoken, and don't try to make yourself out better than you are, or wear a halo with your every-day clothes, like—like some people. Besides, it was so good

of you to care about me all that time when nobody else did, and not to say a word or hint at it—that showed what stuff there was in you. Really I do love you, Tom, and I want you always to remember it, and say to yourself, ‘There’s some one that I can call on if ever I’m in trouble.’ I think I have it in me to be as good a friend as a man.”

“And is that all, Anne? Is that the last word?”

“Yes, dear; the very last.”

Yates gulped down something very like a sob.

“But, Tom,”—Anne’s voice faltered, and she turned away her head a little,—“don’t let it make a break between us. Please don’t! I have so few friends, and I need them so much.”

“Nonsense, Anne; look at all those people the other night.”

“Pooh! They were acquaintances, not friends. What I mean by a friend is a person who lets you alone a good deal, perhaps, when things are going well with you; but once get into trouble, there he is at your side, and all of a sudden it does n’t seem trouble any more, because he’s there, and he believes in you through thick and thin. And if people say nasty things about you, he just smiles and lets them talk; but he takes your hand afterward, so it’s a comfort; and you

look into his eyes and you know what *he* thinks, and then you don't care any more."

Anne was holding her head high, and the color was flaming in her cheeks, red as the poppy-beds they had left behind them on the hillsides. She walked along the Via Cavour with the air of one who scorned to change her state with kings.

Yates looked at her a little awed. He did not know her in this mood. He was obliged to quicken his footsteps to keep pace with her. They walked on rapidly in silence till a turn brought them to the gateway of San Marco.

Two people were coming out, and met them face to face. Anne drew her breath sharply.

"Why, hulloa, Eunice!" exclaimed Tom. "I thought you were going to a rehearsal this morning. You said so when I left."

"It—it was given up."

"No matter," said Anne; "all forms of art are equally desirable."

Eunice looked up quickly; then as quickly her eyelids drooped and hid the expression of her eyes.

"Yes, I look back on Signor Paladino's illness as almost providential, since it brought me a new knowledge of Fra Angelico." Here she paused an instant and added under her breath, "and of Mr. Walford."

Walford was looking down and nervously fingering the black cross which he always wore. Anne fixed her eyes upon him and studied him calmly.

“Is it a place where I ought to go?” asked Yates, struggling valiantly with the difficulties of the situation. “Any pictures in there worth seeing?”

“I am afraid, Tom,” his sister answered sweetly, “that the frescos would not please you. One needs the artistic temperament and a deeply spiritual nature to care for the Fra Angelicos. We have been wandering around among them in a foolish kind of rapture. But even you, Tom, would be interested in the prior’s cell, where you see Savonarola’s chair and his rosary and hair shirt, and a piece of wood from the fire in which he was burned. If you notice, Cousin Anne, that my eyes are red, I may as well confess that they drew the tears, these silent symbols of so much useless sacrifice. I wish you could have heard what Mr. Walford said of them, of what a waste it all was, and how necessary it was to see our way clearly before we rushed into martyrdom.”

“Poor Savonarola!” Anne exclaimed with a slightly ironical emphasis.

“Yes, that’s just the way in which Mr. Wal-

ford spoke of him. He says he does so pity a man who makes mistake in his life-work."

"All mistakes are pitiable," said Anne. For the first time Walford raised his eyes; but they fell again before her calm, direct gaze.

"Some are unpardonable," he murmured.

Anne saw no reason for a response. She stood looking at him with a sense of admiration of his physical beauty, the sensitive mouth, the intellectual brow, and the impressive setting of the head upon the shoulders; but, with all this, she was conscious of an aloofness, as if he were no longer in her world.

After an instant's pause she turned to Yates, saying: "Come, Tom; if we are to get the morning light on those pictures we must hurry. Good morning, Mr. Walford. Good morning, Eunice. And, Oh, by the way, next time we meet will you try to remember the prescription for my headache? You know you came up to the villa on purpose to give it to me, but something must have driven it out of your mind."

Anne thrust the remark in to the hilt. Even the men felt that something was amiss.

Eunice colored.

"Forgive me, Anne!" she said gently; and then she and Walford turned away, while Mrs. Blythe and her cousin went on toward the Ac-

cademia. Before they had gone more than a few steps Yates stopped short.

"Anne, how much do you care about seeing those pictures?"

"Not a brass farthing," Anne answered.

"Then, if you don't mind, suppose we don't go in. I'm not up to it."

"Very well; let us go home," said Mrs. Blythe; and they turned on their steps, retracing the way through the street, out at the city gates, and up the long Fiesole hill. All the way they scarcely spoke. When they reached the gate of the villa, Mrs. Blythe broke the silence, saying:

"You 'll come in, won't you, Tom?"

"No, thank you, Anne; not to-day. I could n't quite stand it."

"Very well — another day, then." Anne held out the right hand of fellowship. Tom took it.

"And, Anne, there 's another thing I wanted to say. I 've always thought you were too hard on Eunice. You 're right; she 's a *cat*."

Mrs. Blythe put out her other hand and grasped both of Tom's cordially.

"Now we *are* friends," she said, smiled into his eyes for a moment, and, turning, walked swiftly through the gate.

On the terrace Fleming and the Bishop were pacing to and fro, the former with a cigar, the

latter with hands locked behind him, under his coat, after a fashion which he had acquired years before in his study, pondering his sermons. Anne decided that she would change her dress before joining them, and slipped into the house by a side door.

The two men continued their walk and their talk. In Rome they had formed a habit of intimate companionship, and they spoke their minds to each other with a freedom possible only to reserved men who find at last a channel of communication at once safe and easy, able to bear conversational shipping of heavy draft, and yet with frequent harbors for small talk.

A turn in their promenade brought Yates's retreating figure in view.

"I wonder why he did not come in," the Bishop said.

Fleming, having no explanation to offer, attempted none.

"I'm glad that he did n't," he ventured.

"I am not sorry myself: I cannot understand what my niece sees to like in him."

"I can —" Fleming began, and then bit his lip.

"What is it?"

"Pardon me! I did not intend to volunteer my opinion in such an intimate matter. It was very stupid."

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“On the contrary, you can be of real service by speaking candidly. I should be much obliged if you would, and you know, I think, that it will go no further.”

“Then,” said Fleming, throwing away his cigar, “I should say that it lies in the fact that Mrs. Blythe likes a sense of superiority, and that Yates offers an excellent opportunity for it.”

“You think it ’s only that ?”

“Not quite.”

“What else ?”

“Oh, Mrs. Blythe’s nature has many sides. After she has carried her esthetics and philosophizing a shade too far, she loves to throw them aside and plunge into frank materialism. There ’s where Yates appeals to her. Besides, she enjoys her liking for him as a neat antithesis to her dislike of his sister. We can’t afford to dislike too many people at the same time. It reflects on our own amiability.”

“You understand Anne, I see.”

“Only in phases, here and there. It would be a bold man who professed to understand Mrs. Blythe’s character as a whole. She is as full of surprises as a Christmas-box.”

“Yes, too many by half! She has no underlying principle of consistency in her actions.”

“Is n’t that, after all, what makes her charm

in a too well-regulated world? She has no pre-arranged platitudes of conduct."

"If Anne had more platitudes of conduct it would be less fatiguing for one who feels the responsibility. I am often anxious."

"Don't you think, Bishop, that, believing in Providence as you do, you might trust something to it?"

"To return to Yates—" said the Bishop, who was a passed master in the art of changing the topic of conversation.

"Yes; to return to Yates—" assented Fleming.

"He is a curious product of metropolitan life," the Bishop observed, "a thorough barbarian, with a veneer of civilization."

"I fancy a man must be something of a barbarian to succeed as Yates has done. The privilege of sensitiveness is reserved for the second generation of success."

"And the privilege of decadence for the third."

"Yes; those are time's revenges."

"But, after all," said the Bishop, "we are speaking of a vulgar success."

"What extension do you give to the word 'vulgar'?"

"I call a vulgar success one which sets the material above the spiritual, which dispenses with ideals. Christianity owes its distinction to the

stress it lays on the value of thoughts *versus* things. Fancy the magnificent audacity of Paul, standing up in that hard old Roman world and telling the men of Rome and Corinth and Ephesus that their glory of temples and palaces was a mere delusion of the senses, that the only real things—the things of consequence—were repentance and faith, love, joy, peace, and long-suffering!”

“Yes,” thought Fleming, “and when Paul’s Christianity had triumphed, it began straightway to build its own temples and palaces and to knock the fruits of the Spirit off the tree with a club.” He said nothing of this aloud, however. It would have been like interrupting a sermon.

The Bishop warmed to his subject. “They have asked me,” he said, “to preach next Sunday in the American chapel, and I intend to talk about the sham of the Renaissance, the futility of the effort to revive the Greek spirit when the shadow of the cross of Christ had fallen between the ancient and modern worlds. A man might as well pretend himself back into childhood. We cannot ignore an epoch-making experience either in humanity or in the individual. I shall take for my text: ‘And he, bearing his cross, went forth.’”

The men took several turns in silence. Then the Bishop spoke again.

“I don’t think it is any breach of confidence,” he said, “to tell you what led me into this train of thought. Some time ago a man came to me and announced his intention of going to the uttermost parts of the earth as a missionary to an afflicted people. He was hot with zeal and eager for the sacrifice; but the words of my text haunted my mind as I listened to him. I felt that he would not flinch if he were nailed to a cross in view of the multitude; but as to bearing it through unnoted slums and byways before he reached his Calvary, I could not feel sure that it was in him to do it. I advised waiting. I changed the current of his activities, and now, from all that I hear (the man was an intimate friend of friends of mine, and they often write of him), I gather that his purpose is waning, that he is turning from the asceticism of the Cross to the estheticism of the Renaissance. I have had many bad quarters of an hour on the subject with my conscience.”

“I don’t see why you should,” said Fleming; “upon my soul, I don’t. A life-purpose which could be shaken by a counsel of delay would have gone to pieces at the first shock of trial, anyway.— Good morning, Mrs. Blythe!”

XII

“ ONE BEHELD AND DIED ”

“ Some of him lived ; but most of him died
Even as you and I—”

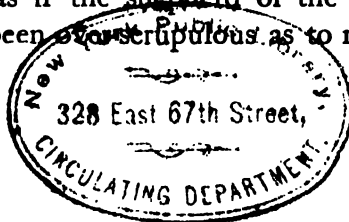
WALFORD was at the crisis of his fate. The crucial moment had come. The question was this: Had his nature inherent nobility enough to humble itself? Would he go back to Anne Blythe and say: “ I did a dishonorable thing. It has poisoned more than half a year of my life with mean, miserable suspicions. Forgive me ” ?

This was what his conscience prompted him to do; but vanity pulled him by the sleeve and whispered: “ Not to her! Humiliate yourself before any one else, but not in the eyes of the woman who has looked up to you for light and guidance. No, not to *her!* ” Moreover, he had made a sort of overture there before San Marco. If Eunice Yates had not been present he would have been glad to say more: He had conjured

up meetings with Mrs. Blythe in which he should make graceful acknowledgment of his perhaps unwarrantable interference in her affairs: but it would not do. Something in Anne's eyes in that instant of their meeting had told him that no superficial balm would heal the wound. It must be probed first. He must say, "I am guilty," or all must remain unsaid. He saw that Anne was ready to accept either alternative, but no compromise. Still, she might have said something—something which would have made it easier. It was not to be expected that a man should humiliate himself in public and before those unsympathetic eyes.

After all, what was it that he had done? A dying woman had handed him an unsealed letter without comment, without any request that he should not inspect it; and she did not belong to the class in which such things are done as a matter of courtesy. Why, of course a man of the world would think nothing of it, and in this case so much had been at stake! It was so desirable that he should know the real state of the case with this interesting parishioner who had opened her heart to him—at least in part—at their first meeting.

It was as if the shepherd of the ninety and nine had been ~~over~~ scrupulous as to methods of



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learning the whereabouts of the lost sheep. It was his *business* to know. Really he should have blamed himself if she had done wrong and he had failed to arm himself at all points to help her. God knew he would not have been as hard toward her as she had shown herself to him. To be sure, she had *not* done wrong, and that complicated everything.

To some men that scene in the Piacevole music-room would have carried no conviction; but to Walford it was final. He was no more inclined to weigh evidence now than months ago in Central Park, when the blow had first fallen. He felt the full force of his blunder, the full discredit of his conduct. Probably Mrs. Blythe would tell the Bishop, and Walford felt his cheek scorch at the thought of that prelate's cynical smile. No, he could not face it.

To comprehend Walford's state of mind it is needful to consider the atmosphere in which he had spent the last year. To be admired is more than most men's heads will bear without turning giddy; to be adored is too much, and adoration or something akin to it had been Walford's portion.

The rift in the lute with Walford was vanity. Unconsciously to himself, it had lain at the bottom of his noblest aspirations, and was so inter-

mixed with them that to strike at one was to destroy the other. He was like a man poisoned with the sacramental wafer.

When he poured out before Bishop Alston his longing to go forth as a soldier of the Cross among the lepers, there was no insincerity in his mind. He did long to go. He longed to be of service to these neglected outcasts. But it must be *he* who rendered the service. It was not so much the thought of help to the lepers, as the thought of himself ministering to them, which appealed to him.

When he felt his heart warm toward Anne Blythe in her grief, there was always the picture in his mind of himself soothing, stimulating, uplifting. Later still, when he read Renée Jaudon's letter, it gave him a certain painful satisfaction to fancy himself the accusing angel bearing the sword of retribution in one hand and the cup of consolation in the other. Always and everywhere Stuart Walford occupied the center of the canvas.

Apollyon struck him in the weakest joint of his armor when he laid that open letter at his feet. The desire for influence,—“influence for good,”—that ideal which Walford had professed at the club, had been the cause of his undoing. Unwilling as he would have been to admit it to

himself, he had found a melancholy interest, during all these months, in the thought of Anne as a penitent, claiming his pity, his sympathy, his intercession at the throne of grace. How could a man who had lived in such a frame of mind for months suddenly admit that it was he who must wear the dust upon his garments, the ashes on his head, and say to the woman whom he loved: "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight"?

Perhaps there had been a deeper note than Eunice Yates could comprehend in Walford's sympathy with Savonarola. Here, too, was a man with noble impulses led hopelessly astray by the mad passion for "influence for good," by that curious confounding of his own voice with the voice of the Lord, which made it seem a blow at the cause of righteousness to confess himself a weak, sinful man.

One wonders if that was in Walford's mind as he looked at the prior's crucifix and shirt of hair there in the convent of San Marco, or if that was the power which drew his steps half unconsciously toward Savonarola's cathedral as he walked the Florentine streets, battling with himself, on this beautiful April afternoon.

It was with a distinct sense of pleasure that he reached the *Duomo*, and lifting the heavy cur-

tain, felt the chill of the church within strike cool on his hot forehead.

To a nature as susceptible as his it almost seemed that the change of air would bring a change of mental atmosphere as well, and he was very tired; so tired that with a sigh of relief he felt the tension about his head give way, and realized that for the first time in twenty-four hours he could stop thinking. That endless repetition of the question, “Shall I see her? Shall I not see her?” ceased to hammer at his brain. He could be still.

It was the hour of vespers, and the distant hymns in the choir, the faint glimmer of the tapers, the scent of the incense, fell upon his weariness like a benediction. He yielded to the spirit of the place and sank down before a side altar — but not to pray; rather to give himself up to the sweetness of the abandonment of struggle — to find rest. He closed his eyes. A long fast and a sleepless night had brought him to the point where men see visions, and indeed white-robed figures seemed to hover about him, and he almost caught the strains which had haunted him ever since the night of Mrs. Blythe’s musicale :

“Angels, ever bright and fair,
Take, oh, take me to your care!”

With the natural association of the song, the singer rose before his eyes. How beautiful she was — this woman who had so lately come into his life! How sympathetic had been her response to his suggestions of the underlying meanings in the *Fra Angelicos*! How uplifting her aspirations; how exalted her predictions of the future that lay before him! Ah, there was some one who trusted and looked up to him! With her there would be no need of painful explanations. If he ever told her the story of the letter, as very likely he might some day, he was sure that he could make her look at it from his point of view — make her see how it all came about. She would understand how good the thread of his intentions had been, even if fate had tangled the skein of action.

In his efforts at self-exculpation he went back to the old pagan idea of fate as a force working from without and independent of human character. He was glad to think of it so. It lifted the burden of responsibility from his weak shoulders and thrust it upon a vast, vague, inscrutable somewhat whose name was *Destiny*.

At length he rose and made his way out at the great doorway. The dream was over. He came out into the light and glow and color and heat of

the open square, into the clash and clang, barter and strife, of every-day existence.

Once outside the door, he stood hesitating at the foot of the steps. In one direction lay the Via Calzaioli, leading to the *pension* in the Lungarno alle Grazie where Eunice Yates was staying. In the opposite direction the Via Ricasoli led to the Porta San Gallo, to Fiesole, — to Anne! Which should he take?

He looked toward the hill rising softly through the mist. Its green, misty slope seemed to beckon him, but the stones lay hard between. He set his teeth and turned northward, walking rapidly for a couple of blocks; then he stopped, breathing heavily. “I cannot do it! I cannot!” he exclaimed; and wheeling about, he strode with determined steps along the Via Calzaioli in the direction of the Arno.

Eunice Yates was sitting alone in the reception-room of the *pension* when Walford entered. He was thankful that it was so. He could not have borne to encounter the groups of idle listeners who, as he knew, would fill the room a little later, when the sight-seeing hours were over.

Clearly his call was well-timed, and he felt that no picture by one of the old masters could have been more beautiful than this which greeted

his eye, of Eunice by the window, working at the embroidery of an altar-cloth. The dull brown plush of the shabby sofa only served as a background for the pure tints of her skin, and the cold north light warmed itself in the brightness of her hair. As Walford came in she rose, with calm welcome, but with no surprise. He, on his part, was far from calm.

"I ought not to have come," he said in an agitated voice, "but I was irresistibly impelled."

"Don't you think it is often like that?" she responded — "that the leading comes if we submit ourselves to the guidance of the Spirit?"

"That is a beautiful thought."

"Yes, to me it is very beautiful. I often think that the prophets and holy men of old differed from other men in just this — their willingness to be led by the Spirit. Is n't it Isaiah who says: 'As for me, the secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living'? It was just submissiveness, was n't it?"

"Thank you!" said Walford, fervently. "I shall use that text for a sermon some day. The words of the sermon will be mine, but the inspiration will be yours. Do you know the meaning of your name? It signifies 'Victory.' I shall always think of it after this."

Eunice looked down and allowed a moment's

appreciative silence to follow Walford's words. Then she spoke :

“What a privilege I have to look forward to in going home, Mr. Walford, to sit under your preaching, to be led by your example and influence ! When I was in America before, my soul was starved for spiritual companionship. My life lay among people — well, people like my cousin, Mrs. Blythe. Dear Anne ! She is so sympathetic in her manner that one is with her a long time before he finds out that she is heartless.”

“Really heartless ?”

“I wish I could think of some kinder word to describe her lack of feeling. You have noticed it already, I am sure, or nothing should tempt me to speak of it.”

“I have noticed a certain lack —”

“Of course you have. A man of your sensitive fiber was sure to notice it. And then, the levity with which she takes serious subjects. I could not admire enough the patience with which you treated her there at San Marco.”

Walford felt as if his crumpled self-respect had been handed back to him, neatly pressed and folded, and altogether almost as good as new. He wrapped himself in it as in a garment. It seemed good to get back to it.

“Oh, one must have patience !” he murmured. “It would ill become a priest to judge others

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harshly. But Mrs. Blythe — what development of her character do you look for ?”

“That,” said Eunice, “will depend on the man whom she marries. Anne has very little original force. Her tone is always drawn from those around her. You who see everything have seen that too.”

“And is there any one with whom you think her marriage likely ?”

“Have you ever thought of Mr. Fleming ?”

Walford started, and for an instant he felt a distinct pang; but it was not real.

“He is a very ardent champion,” he said.

“‘Champion’ — that is just the word. The man who marries Mrs. Blythe will find many things which can be neither reasoned nor explained away — they must be *championed*. I admire Mr. Fleming in spite of his coldness and his satisfaction with himself. I am sure I wish Anne much happiness if she gets him — that is, if circumstances draw them together. If they marry, you know, it will make a strange difference in Anne’s position and mine relatively.”

“Yes, I have heard.”

“I often think — one can but think sometimes of these things — what I should do if her millions should by chance fall into my hands — what I should do with them.”

“What would you do?”

“I think, for one thing, I should found a school of sacred music in New York — right in the center of materialism, in the very core of unbelief and indifference. What a triumph to battle with them through something so impalpable, so gentle, and yet so subduing as music!”

“It is an inspiration.”

Eunice dropped her needle and fixed her eyes beyond Walford. “Yes, I would build an exquisite chapel in connection with some church like St. Simeon’s. I would fill it with sacred relics of the Old World, with tapestries and frescos and fonts and choir-stalls from the churches over here. I would have the finest organ the world could produce — not over-powerful, you know, but perfect in harmony; and there, with all that beauty around them, the musicians should be trained to render Bach and Handel and Palestrina, and at Easter we would give the ‘Messiah’ with a noble chorus!”

Walford looked at her with reverence.

“Such a vision,” he exclaimed, “could not come to you unless Heaven meant to make you the instrument of its fulfilment.”

“I have thought that too; indeed, it was so strongly impressed upon me at the time of my uncle Richard’s death that I almost felt it a mat-

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ter of conscience to contest the will; but an inward voice bade me wait and told me that Cousin Anne's marriage was only a matter of time. You see," she added, smiling gently, "the inward voice was right."

"And the vision will be fulfilled."

Walford looked at her with ardent eyes.

She answered in low, level tones: "I only fear that I should not be equal to its fulfilment. My judgment is not sound enough, my will not firm enough."

Walford moved from his chair to the corner of the sofa opposite Eunice Yates. The window behind cast a nimbus of light round her head, softly silhouetted against the sky. Her beauty stole his judgment.

When he spoke again his voice faltered:

"Did you ever know a *man* worthy in any respect of such a trust?"

The gray eyes opened large upon him. No word was spoken, yet the silence thrilled with meaning.

Walford breathed hard. He took up the skein of embroidery silk and twisted it nervously in his fingers. One of the signs of his lack of early social training was the necessity of doing something with his hands, especially when under any strain or stress.

“Miss Yates!” he said at last; then lower, “Eunice!”

A cool hand fluttered toward him. He caught and held it while he went on:

“Would you count it presumption if I thrust my life-problem upon you?”

Eunice simply looked at him; but he seemed to find the answer of her eyes sufficient and satisfactory, for he went on:

“From the moment when I first saw you there in the Fiesole garden I felt that you had a message for me—that Heaven meant you to be more than a stranger; that our destinies were somehow twisted together, like this silk I have been tangling hopelessly here.”

“Never mind—the silk, I mean. As for the other, I felt it too; and yet how easily we might have missed each other!”

“It could not have been, Eunice—*it could not*. The beings whom fate decrees to be something to each other cannot evade their destiny. It is vain for seas or mountains to set up their barriers between such. As to refusing to heed the call of soul to soul, the blade of grass might as well refuse to bend before the wind. When affinity asserts itself it is absolute, compelling, and will be obeyed. Therefore I shall make no excuses for laying bare my heart to you.”

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Eunice sighed; but it was not the sigh of melancholy.

“When I was a mere boy,” Walford went on, keeping meanwhile a lookout toward the door, lest some one should be overhearing, “I was fired with the desire to be of use in the world. When men praised my eloquence, a mere trick of speech in my own eyes, I asked only to be allowed to lay it as an acceptable sacrifice on the altar of the Lord. Then I read of Damien and of how he had given up his life to the service of the lepers. Ah! you shudder; but it is because you think of the trials and not of the rewards. I felt that nothing would make me happier than to follow in his footsteps. I made my plans; I was ready to go. I went to Bishop Alston and begged him to bless my mission and receive my vows.”

“And he,” questioned Eunice, leaning forward, “what did he say? Did he not plead against such a sacrifice?”

“‘Sacrifice’ — that was what he called it, and the word startled me. Not that I thought of my own paltry life — I felt that I had flung that ahead of me into the battle, as Douglas flung the heart of Bruce; but I said to myself: ‘What if it were a sacrifice in the higher sense? What if in another field my gifts would serve a deeper need and in a wider sphere?’”



““ WOULD YOU COUNT IT PRESUMPTION IF I THRUST MY LIFE-PROBLEM UPON YOU? ””



“Yes, indeed,” Eunice murmured; “you ought surely to think of that.”

“The feeling has grown upon me — I confess it has — as my eyes have been opened to the many avenues of the world’s work. More than that, I have been brought to see the moral leprosy which exists, not far off, but close at our doors, there in New York, where the lepers are not even in the slums, but live in rich men’s palaces and eat at rich men’s tables. I have asked myself: ‘Have I any right to turn away from such as these, my brethren, to give myself to strangers and aliens?’”

“A man of your breadth and depth of spiritual experience was sure to come to that — you could not escape it.”

“You think so, Eunice — you really think so?”

“To me it is as clear as sunlight on crystal. The Lord adapts men to the work which He has for them to do. If He had really meant you for this missionary service of which you dreamed in your young enthusiasm, He would have given you a sturdy body and a phlegmatic soul capable of long resistance to disease, and calmness in the face of the sufferings of others. Instead He has endowed you with an exquisite sensitiveness of nature, attuned to all beauty, and then be-

stowed upon you the incomparable gift of eloquence to move the hearts of your fellow-men and stir in them noble impulses to all divine aspirations. Do not, I beg of you, do not throw away this heaven-sent opportunity; do not ignore this unmistakable leading of Providence."

"I cannot tell you how it helps me to have you speak with such a fervor of conviction. I will not deny that it chimes in with the conclusions of my own judgment; but I so feared to be misled by any considerations of self."

"The only danger will lie in considering yourself too little. It is an arduous work on which you are entering, if you decide to labor in the home vineyard."

"It is—I appreciate that; but that only makes it the better worth while. I have laid my problem before you, Eunice, and I am resolved to abide by your decision. You know the circumstances—you know how I long to go; but you can estimate, perhaps better than I can myself, the need of me where I am. Which shall it be? Shall I stay or go?"

"Believe me, you should stay. Your field, your calling, your career, your duty, all lie in New York."

"But, Eunice, like you, I fear to enter upon this new life, this changed career, alone. If I go

out among the lepers, my course is clear—I give up at the outset all that makes life dear to most men; but if I remain among my fellows, I must live as men live—to reach and influence them I must be thoroughly one of them; so you see you have solved only half my problem, after all.”

Eunice looked down with an air of sweet and bashful bewilderment.

“What can I say? How do you wish me to answer?”

“By looking into your own heart and telling me what you find there. Is it love? Do you even feel that it ever might be love?”

“How can I tell? Woman’s love is but an echo, and her heart only whispers the word in answer to a man’s voice.”

“The man’s voice is speaking now, Eunice. It says: ‘I love you.’”

“Are you sure of yourself—sure that no other woman rules your heart?”

“Not my heart—I see clearly now that it is only my fancy that has been touched before now. My heart was left for you. For the first time I feel that I have reached the full stature of manhood and learned what love means. I have met a woman who can enter into my highest hopes and my deepest feelings. I love you, Eunice. Tell me that you love me too!”

“The time has been so short!”

“Short? Not if you count it by heart-beats.”

“No; but short to forget that other woman.”

“Listen, Eunice! I admit that I have spent the last year under the spell of a woman far different from you. I was deceived,—bitterly deceived,—and I have had a cruel awakening. I could scarcely have borne it, I think, but that just when my grief was heaviest and my need sorest, you appeared, and I knew that my dream of perfect womanhood was not all a dream—that in your keeping lay peace.”

Eunice laid down her work, folded her long white hands before her, and sank back. Every line of her figure suggested the repose for which Walford's soul was yearning. His pulses throbbed, his senses swam, he felt himself dizzy with the wine of hope.

“Dearest!” he said, leaning forward and suddenly raising the hand to his lips, “my destiny lies in these white hands of yours. Am I to go alone—or to stay—with you?”

“Stay—with me!” whispered Eunice.

And the soul of Stuart Walford went out like the flame of a candle in the wind.

XIII

THE COMING SHADOW

“Blind and deaf that we are; oh, think if thou yet love anybody living, wait not till death sweep down the paltry little dust-clouds and idle dissonances of the moment and all be at last so mournfully clear and beautiful when it is too late!”

“**G**EORGE, I have made up my mind to send for your father.”

“Don’t! For Heaven’s sake, *don’t!*”

As he spoke, the boy raised himself from the pillows on the lounge against which he had been leaning, and looked pleadingly at Fleming.

Fleming laughed; but there was a catch at his throat. He had grown immensely fond of George Newton. We love people more for what we are to them than for what they are to us; but aside from the fact that he had been good to the boy and felt a corresponding glow of heart toward him, he had come to feel a distinct interest in this idealistic, inarticulate, beauty-loving nature which could only feel, and so rarely succeeded in making itself felt. The evident bodily frailness and inse-

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cure tenure of life, too, lent their added charm. The death of a youth thrills us with the pathos of the unfulfilled, and Fleming's tenderness vibrated more and more to these minor chords. He did not dare to look into the future. Every week was forcing home upon him the conviction that George's days were numbered, and he could only console himself with the reflection that they were the happiest of the boy's life.

He crushed back the melancholy which weighed heavily on his soul, and answered George's protest with a smile, repeating:

"Yes, I shall certainly send for him. I shall tell him that your devotion to Miss Yates is becoming a matter of public notoriety and making the Florentine hair to stand on end, that you took cold the other day walking in the wind to the Mercato Nuovo to buy roses for your inamorata, and that, in short, I can't manage you, and he must come and take charge."

"Now, Mr. Fleming, you would n't joke like that — not with *Father!*"

"See here, Master George! I have a great respect for your father, and being of a weak and impressionable nature, I have more respect than ever since he has taken all these medals and made his place in the scientific world; but I don't know that he has yet attained that awful

height of greatness where it is blasphemy to joke with him."

"That is n't what I mean. You may joke about yourself as much as you like, but don't say anything about me. I would n't have him come on my account."

"But he is in London. What would it be for him to run down to Florence? He might do that just to see the pictures, you know, not to mention such a trifling matter as his son."

"Oh, he would n't want to come,—I 'm sure he would n't,—and he 'll be no end put out at the thought of coming here. He grudges every day away from his laboratory."

"Put out!" exclaimed Fleming, his irritation with Newton finding its way to the surface in spite of himself. "Put out by being sent for to look after his boy?"

"Oh, Father does n't care much about me, you know; we were never chummy in the way you and I are."

"And your mother—were you and she chums?"

"Well, no. Not exactly."

"And yet you are anxious to go home?"

"Yes; I want to see my dog."

"But you can't talk music to your dog."

"Indeed I do—talk to him by the hour to-

gether, and play to him, too. Next to him, I'd rather talk to you than to any one in the world."

"Except Miss Yates," interrupted Fleming, in a mocking voice.

George laughed; but the flush in his face deepened.

"Never mind about her," he said, "but promise me you won't send for my father. You may try to put it off on Miss Yates, but I know why you're sending; and there's no need, really there is n't."

"Well, well, there's plenty of time to think it over, and we will not decide anything in a hurry; only don't get excited, old man! Put your feet up—so—and I'll spread the rug over them."

"What a duffer a man is at taking care of sick people!" Fleming thought as he folded the rug, which suddenly seemed to become all corners and fringe.

Some one knocked at the door, and a bell-boy came in, bringing a tray loaded with hothouse grapes and jonquils.

"For Mr. Newton."

George kicked away the rug and jumped up to take the card, but his face fell as he read it. "They're from Mrs. Blythe," he said, "and the

card 's partly to you. It asks if she can see Mr. Fleming at the door of the hotel for a moment."

"Yes," said Fleming, "say that I will come down at once; and, George, if you won't be lonely I'll turn in at the smoking-room and smoke my cigar before I come up. It would n't do to set you coughing with it up here."

"All right," George answered cheerfully. "Thank Mrs. Blythe for the flowers and the grapes."

"And shall I add that you would have liked them a little better if they had come from Miss Yates?"

Fleming did not wait for a reply, but seized his hat and made his way with rapid strides down the stairs, through the long corridor, and out into the street, bright with the slant light of the setting sun.

An open carriage was drawn up by the curb, and Mrs. Blythe sat in it, looking absently down the street, so absently that she started when Fleming spoke her name.

"I have come to inquire for George," she said; "you seemed worried about him the other night."

"How did you know that?"

"Oh, I saw it from your way of looking at him. I've been thinking about him since, and last night, as I looked down on the mist lying

over the river, I decided that he ought not to be here in all this dampness."

"I think that you are perfectly right," said Fleming. "George has grown steadily worse here, and I should have taken him south again before this; but we came here to consult Dr. Branchi, and his tests and diagnosis take time. As soon as we get results I shall write to the boy's father, for, to tell the truth, I don't feel willing to take the responsibility any longer."

"I should n't think that you would, certainly not here in this dismal hotel. And all that you say fits in with my plans. I want you to bring George up to the villa and let us help you to take care of him till his father comes, at any rate, and then we can decide."

Fleming shook his head with emphasis; but before he could speak Mrs. Blythe went on: "Now, remember, this is n't an invitation to you at all, except as George's guardian. It's to him, and you have no right to decline it, if you believe that the high and dry air of Fiesole is better for him than the dampness of this malarious old Lungarno. We have a room facing south and opening on a loggia where he can sit in the sun all day."

Fleming hesitated. "Oh, we could not — we must not!" he exclaimed, sorely tempted. "It

would mean such a lot of bother for you. Why should you ?”

“It is only my plain duty,” Anne answered.

Fleming put his foot up on the step and leaned against the coachman’s seat.

“Do you remember,” he said, smiling, “a young woman who told me a year ago that doing her duty meant doing what did n’t please her in order that some one else might do what pleased him, and that in the end there was no gain in social economy ?”

“To tell the truth, it was not exactly duty that brought me.”

“What, then ?”

“The reasons are personal to myself.”

“And are not to be inquired into ?”

“Precisely.”

“Perhaps I could guess. May I ?”

“No — yes — you may guess three times.”

“And you will answer ?”

“Three times — no more.”

“Here goes, then : It is a penance ?”

“Not at all. Is n’t my uncle a bishop ?”

“True. I had n’t thought of that. Indulgences ought to come more easily. But I have two more guesses. Oh, I know : You are troubled with cats at the villa, and you wish George to play his violin to them.

“George plays very well, as you know.”

“So that is not it, and I have only one guess left. You promised to answer truly ?”

Mrs. Blythe nodded, though she kept her eyes fastened to the gilt buttons on the back of the coachman’s coat.

“You are doing it because you think I am tired and you know I am a duffer.”

No answer.

“Is that it ?”

Mrs. Blythe raised her parasol to shield her eyes from the sun.

“Is that it ?”

“Tell Luigi to drive on, please.”

“Luigi will not move at present except over my dead body.”

“Mr. Fleming, you are not civil.”

“It is only my civility which prevents my observing that you are not truthful.”

“Truthfulness,” said Mrs. Blythe, “is a much overrated virtue.”

“I thought that you objected to the absence of it in Miss Yates.”

“It is a small nature which twits people with their confidences.”

“But to return to the original subject.”

“I will tell you, perhaps—at the villa. I shall send the carriage at noon to-morrow.”

“Mrs. Blythe —”

The Bishop came out of a shop close at hand and stood on the curb, waiting for the carriage. Anne closed her parasol.

“Till to-morrow, then. *A rivederci!* Drive on, Luigi.”

Fleming withdrew his foot from the step of the carriage. Mrs. Blythe bowed. The driver cracked his whip, and the carriage rattled down the street. Fleming entered the smoking-room of the hotel, seating himself by a window which gave a view of the open square.

He drew out a cigar and lighted it; but it went out several times, because he was too absent-minded to keep it going. The sun sank lower and lower, and darkness grew in the room. Darkness grew in his soul, too. He blamed himself for yielding to the temptation of Mrs. Blythe's invitation. It was best for George, of course; but some other way might have been devised. Here he was deliberately putting himself in a position where his resolution would be tried to the utmost, and he had come to a time of life when he realized that the prayer, “Lead us not into temptation,” was no vain petition; that nine tenths of the broken vows, the falls from purpose, come from failure to make the stand soon enough. Well, it was too late to

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consider all that now ; and, after all, it was only for a few days.

He looked out of the window. A band was playing lively airs in the center of the square. Then the retreat sounded, and the little Italian soldiers scurried from all quarters toward the barracks, leaving the square empty and desolate except where the moon, rising slowly through the translucent dusk, laid her pale bars of light across the pavement. It grew darker. The moon dappled the square with still pools of light. The bulk of the houses rose black against them.

There are some temperaments to which moonlight is profoundly depressing. Fleming's spirits sank steadily as he sat gazing into the deserted square, so like life — the noise and mirth and hurrying to and fro, and then the darkness and the reflection from the dead planet, type of the future of our world.

As if in response to his thoughts, a black-robed procession bearing torches moved slowly through the space, and Fleming recognized the brothers of the Misericordia on their way to fulfil the last sad offices for the dead. The sight chimed with his mood. Taking up his hat, he passed out into the street and followed in the wake of the funeral train till it turned a corner and was lost in the courtyard of a palace.

Fleming stood still, with uncovered head, looking after it. The moon shone full upon his face and also upon a man on the other side of the narrow street. It was Stuart Walford.

The two men recognized each other instantly. Walford crossed the street. Fleming made a motion as if to walk on; Walford took his arm, and walked on with him toward the Ponte Santa Trinita.

"There is something I wish to say to you," Walford began hesitatingly, "and I don't just know how to say it."

"So many things are better left unsaid, don't you think?"

"Still I feel as if I ought to say this."

"Very well."

"It's about what we were talking of at Mrs. Blythe's musicale."

"About Mrs. Blythe?"

"Yes, about Mrs. Blythe. It was all a mistake. I should n't want you to go on believing a mistake."

"I was in no danger. I knew Mrs. Blythe. But you — how did you discover your mistake? Who told you that it was not true?"

"She told me herself."

"You asked her?"

Fleming's tone cut like a whip-lash.

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Walford answered tremulously:

"No; I did n't ask her. I simply handed her a letter which I had been asked to hand to her. It was the letter which accused her."

The two men had reached the bridge and stopped, facing each other. Fleming let a long pause fall; then he said slowly:

"Had you read that letter?"

Walford's face whitened in the moonlight. He half turned, and leaning on the railing of the bridge, he stared at the sluggish river, gleaming in the moonlight, dark brown in the shadow of the bank. His silence pleaded for mercy, but Fleming was relentless. "You *had* read the letter, I see," he persisted. "Had you been asked to read it?"

Walford bent his face till it was quite in shadow. "A dying woman gave it to me," he began.

"It was Renée Jaudon, I suppose."

"Yes, it was. She sent for me there in the hospital when she was dying. She gave me the letter, and she said she trusted me with it fully and entirely. I understood that she trusted me to use my judgment in the matter."

"Did she say all that, or did she only say that she trusted you?"

"I know of no obligation on my part, Mr.

Fleming, to submit to this cross-examination from you. I felt that I owed it to myself as a gentleman to leave you under no misapprehension as to Mrs. Blythe. There my duty ends."

Fleming appeared scarcely to hear him. "Renée Jaudon broke her faith with us," he said calmly, "and you broke your faith with her. I am not surprised in either case. Good night, Mr. Walford."

Fleming took off his hat with that formal courtesy which men assume to protect themselves from intimacy, and turning on his heel, he strode away in the direction of the hotel, muttering under his breath a single word, "Cad!"

Blair Fleming passed for a good-natured man. In reality he was capable of such rage as few men know; but he had long ago learned that he could not afford to let it get beyond his lips. Consequently not many of those who knew him were aware of its heights and depths. Tonight, however, the flood-gates were open, and to himself he gave free vent to the rush of indignant contempt in his soul.

"Anne Blythe in love with such a thing as *that!*" he exclaimed aloud, as he strode solitary under the shadow of the wide-corniced buildings and recalled Mrs. Blythe's smiling confession to him at the musicale. "In love with *him!* I'd

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rather see her married to Tom Yates. Vulgarian as he is, he 's a man at least, and an honest one. But to the end of the chapter women will go on falling in love with these sentimentalists in spite of all that other men can say or do."

Fleming rushed along faster and faster, his hands thrust deep in the pockets of his coat, his head thrown back, and his eyes fixed on the stars, which seemed to twinkle from over the house-tops with such friendly sympathy that he blurted his heart out to them, and they looked down as patiently as though no lover had ever before sought their consolation or poured out doubts and despair and anger and love under their kindly light.

In his absorption Fleming twice passed the door of his hotel; but on reaching it the third time he turned in. Passing the door of the smoking-room, he saw it lighted, and noticed a copy of the London "Times" lying on the table. He went in and took it up, thinking that he might chance upon Newton's name. He was not disappointed. Under the heading of "An American Honored by Scientists" he saw an account of a dinner to be given to Newton at the Hotel Cecil on the 20th — the 20th, and this was the 14th. That meant that he must wait until the function was over.

And yet, a week at Mrs. Blythe's, in her presence daily and with the easy familiarity of a household guest — could he carry it through, he wondered, carry it through and make no sign ?

“Well, George,” he said to himself, as he slowly mounted the steps, “I'd do a good deal for you ; but this is the toughest thing that could be asked of me.”

XIV

“ONE DESTROYED THE YOUNG PLANTS”

“Soon or late, sardonic Fate
With man against himself conspires ;
Puts on the mask of his desires :
Up the steps of Time elate
Leads him blinded with his pride,
And gathering, as he goes along,
The fuel of his suicide.”

“**A**FTER the dinner given in his honor at the Cecil by a distinguished group of the Royal Society, Dr. Newton rose to respond to the following toast :

“To our Guest, the Representative of American Scientists.

‘Men our brothers, men the workers, ever seeking something new.’

“I have to thank you, gentlemen,” he said, “for two things in connection with this toast : first, for selecting the line from the only poem with which I am familiar ; and next, for giving me so good a text for the things I should like to say :

“‘*Brothers*’ and ‘*workers*.’ If there is any set of men on God’s earth to whom these words are applicable, it is the men of science. They of all professions have done most to make life contributive rather than competitive. Whatever one has learned has been fully laid open for the teaching and advancement of the rest; whatever one accomplishes is rejoiced in by all, and in return there is no reward to which the scientist looks with such eagerness as to the approval of other scientists.

“As one of your most distinguished members once said: ‘The sole order of nobility which, in my judgment, becomes a philosopher is the rank which he holds in the estimation of his fellow-workers, who are the only competent judges in such matters.’

“With this in mind, you will have no difficulty in understanding the depth of my gratitude and my appreciation of such a tribute as this to me, and through me to my American fellow-workers.”

From this beginning the speaker went on to indicate the lines along which America was likely to make her special contribution to scientific work, the vast fields of observation offered by her great West, the prodigious sums of money poured into her lap to support scientific investi-

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gation and exploration, the growing number of institutions existing for special research, and finally the resistless energy which had flooded the country with material wealth and now was turning its force into the channels dug for it by the scientific workers of the Old World, men to whom Americans were in no danger of forgetting their indebtedness. They only asked the privilege of repaying some fragment of the debt by their own contribution.

"I profoundly hope," he ended, "that the years to come may prove our right to add the other line of the couplet from which you quote:

'That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do.'"

Newton had a confused sense of clapping and cheering as he took his seat, but he was too much bewildered by the scene around him to realize it fully. The electric lights struck sharply in his eyes and dazzled him, the fumes of the wine seemed to go to his brain.

Could this be really he, Maxwell Newton, whose praises were being sounded by speaker after speaker? And the speakers themselves, could they be live men, and not the frontispieces of the books which lined his library shelves at home? Was it possible that the toast-master

was that leader of English scientific thought whom he had dreamed of meeting some day? that the man on the right, shaking him by the hand, was *the* Sir John Larned, F.R.S., whose book on the “Genesis of Instinct” had first turned his thoughts to the theme which had grown into his life-work?

The first volume of Newton’s work on Cellular Psychology had been published only a little more than three months, and already he found himself a marked man.

His paper on “Æsthesis and Tropesis in the Atom” had carried off the honors of the meeting of the Association for Scientific Research yesterday. To-night at the dinner it had been the topic most widely and hotly discussed, and he who had been a solitary worker felt for the first time the electric current which runs through such a gathering, quickening every fiber of the mind, raising every faculty to its highest power, making the unattainable the possible, and the difficult the desirable.

Moreover, in this company Newton had known the crowning satisfaction of finding himself “not least, but honored of them all.”

He wore the “invidious purple” of fame with a pride far above the cheap gratification of vanity, rather with a high sense of responsibility and

the thrill of an immense impetus to carry forward the work which brought such rewards. He was not yet fifty. Twenty years of splendid activity should lie before him. Life opened out large and luminous.

The elation was still upon him when the dinner was over and the party broke up. He and Larned came out of the hotel together, and stood for an instant on the steps lighting their cigars, sharply outlined against the light which streamed through the plate-glass of the doors behind them.

"A foggy night," said Newton, peering out toward the Strand through the gray mist.

"Yes, foggy even for London," Larned answered.

The man at the entrance touched his hat and "'oped they 'd get safe 'ome, sirs."

"He evidently doubts our ability to take care of ourselves after a dinner," said Larned. "Shall we have this cab?"

"Thanks! But if you 'd as lief, I 'd rather walk," Newton answered; "I shall sleep better to put in a bit of exercise between that dinner and bed."

"It was a great ovation," said Larned, cordially, "but disappointing as these big public affairs always are from the point of talk. I 'd like it if you would breakfast with me at the club

to-morrow at twelve, and we'll get hold of two or three other men who will be specially interested to talk over your paper. By the way, you will publish it, of course.”

“I think not — certainly not at present,” Newton answered. “It is in a sense copyrighted by this semi-public reading, and before publishing it I shall spend two or three years in verifying and qualifying. It is a weakness of my countrymen to rush into print with half-digested theories.”

“Not a weakness of yours!” Larned exclaimed, with enthusiasm; “your work has roundness, solidity, force.”

“Thank you; there is nothing I would rather hear said of it; but I feel its shortcomings. We are babies in science compared with you fellows over here; but I am learning something of your secret of concentration and limitation. I have made up my mind to devote the rest of my life to the study of psychoplasm.”

Larned murmured something about “being on your guard against narrowing influences.”

“Narrowing, my dear Sir John! Why, there is nothing between heaven and hell toward which it does not reach out. Life and death and immortality are involved in the question of cellular psychic activities. The only trouble is that so

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little can be done toward solving the problems in a single lifetime ; — but I have a son.”

“ Indeed ! ”

“ Yes, a boy of sixteen. I intend that he shall follow in my footsteps, and I hope that he will go much further. He should, with all that I can teach him and with the facilities which I shall be able to place at his command.”

“ And the boy — is he interested to pursue this branch of work ? ”

It was the same question which Fleming had asked, and its iteration irritated Newton’s overstrung nerves. “ It must interest him. It shall ! ” he went on insistently. “ What in the world is really worth living for in comparison with such work as mine ? ”

“ It is a great work. I ’m not denying that. Still I don’t believe in forcing any one into it. I have five boys of my own. Not one of them cares a penny about my interests, and they all hate the sight of my laboratory.”

“ And you don’t insist upon it ? ”

“ Not I. If the beggars prefer boating and cricket, why, let them. I took the responsibility of bringing them into the world, and the least I can do, now that they are here, is to give them a happy boyhood. At least, that is the way I look at it.”

“After all,” said Newton, “what we or our children accomplish amounts to very little. The individual is only the fly on the chariot-wheel. All we can say is that it is better to be the fly on the wheel than the log that stops its progress even for an instant.”

“Yes,” assented Larned; “there is a kind of dizzy delight in feeling the motion of the wheel under us. But, after all, it is only *one* of the pleasures of life!”

Newton threw open his coat and took in a deep breath of the night air.

“This sort of thing makes me homesick for my laboratory,” he said. “All these social functions are pleasant and stimulating; but, for the pure joy of living, give me the solitude of the study, when there is no one to disturb you, and you can go nosing about among the secrets which nature shuts up in her closets. I can’t imagine anything making a man really unhappy while he has his work.”

“I can,” Larned began; but Newton broke in: “No! Science is all-satisfying — all-absorbing. We must look to her for the joys which men used to find in religion.”

Larned shook his head doubtfully.

“I question,” he said, “whether science can ever supply us with all-sufficing happiness, be-

cause she makes no response to the emotions. She is a Galatea for whom we may break our hearts, but we cannot make her feel. She has no tenderness for humanity, let them slave as they will in her service."

"But the service, man! The service *is* the reward and the satisfaction and the glory. For myself I ask nothing beyond. It suffices. These are my lodgings," he added, as they stopped before a red brick house with white trimmings. "Is it too late to ask you to come in? Good night, then."

"Good night. And I will look for you at twelve to-morrow at the club."

Newton went up the steps with the lightness which is born of elation and simulates youth. He turned the key in the door of his room and entered. Sardonic fate gave no warning of what awaited him within.

The landlady had looked after his comfort. A glowing bed of coals freshly raked lay in the grate, and a kettle simmered on the hob. Newton warmed his hands before the fire for a moment, then went to the closet, brought out a gray earthenware jug, poured a portion of whisky into a tumbler, and added hot water from the kettle.

He sat down in an apoplectic chair, fatly cushioned, and covered in purple-red reps. The

glass stood on the table beside him, and as he lifted it he saw for the first time a pile of envelopes leaning against the lamp. The upper one bore an American stamp. It was in his wife's handwriting, and he opened it first, as in duty bound.

Mrs. Newton wrote for the pleasure of the sender rather than the receiver of the letter, and she was not skilled in the art of selection. All the events of the day had equal value in her eyes, and found equal prominence on the pages traced with her large round characters. The vines had been planted, but the gardener was terribly upset because the order came so late, and she was sure she did not know what she could have done about it. How could she let him know any earlier, when Newton would not answer the questions about it in his last letter, and did he think it was quite fair, when she was taking all the trouble, that he should n't even answer a simple question?

Newton's eye traveled rapidly over the page. One can read rapidly when he is not afraid of missing anything. On the next sheet it transpired that the dog had caught a hedgehog and that some of the quills were still lodged in the roof of his mouth. She wished that her husband would ask some of the scientific gentlemen he

was meeting what would be the best lotion for a dog's mouth. The carpets ought to be taken up and beaten; but she had decided to wait till fall and send them to the Steam Cleaning Company. She missed George and was glad that Newton was having such a good time in London. For herself, she preferred America. Europeans all took their breakfast in bed and had other untidy habits, and she was his affectionate wife, Ida Wilkins Newton.

When Newton had finished reading the letter, he folded it neatly, returned it to the envelope, and laid it on the bed of coals, where it turned bright for a time, and then reverted to its original dullness. Newton had never acquired the habit of preserving his wife's letters.

Having disposed of this, he looked over the other envelopes in the pile, and after sorting out and putting aside an unimportant half-dozen, he took up a square one, broke the seal, then drew the lamp nearer, and settled back in his chair as he unfolded the sheet of paper — "the fuel of his suicide." The letter was from Fleming.

"DEAR NEWTON [it ran]: I hate to break in upon your gala week there in London with bad tidings, but they won't keep. I am afraid that I have held my tongue too long. George seemed

so much better while we were in Naples that I thought the turn for the better had come. Then we came up to Rome, and something went wrong. We had sunny rooms, and never went out at night; but in spite of all, the cough came back, and things have gone from bad to worse. We hurried on to Florence to see Dr. Branchi, who withheld his verdict till to-day. When I saw him this morning he shook his head and said that he thought the boy's father should be notified. Of course we all hope that things may turn out brighter than they look just now. George himself is hopeful, talks confidently of going home, and would by no means forgive me if he knew that I was writing to you. Perhaps when you come you will find him so much better that you will fall on me with deserved imprecations for giving you an unnecessary fright; if not —"

Here the letter ended abruptly, as if the writer had been suddenly called away and only took time, on returning to his writing, to scrawl "Blair Fleming" at the end, followed by a hasty postscript:

"The doctor thinks you 'd better come at once."

When he had finished reading, Newton turned the page and began again, forcing himself to take in the meaning of the words and the weightier meaning that lay between the words; then he laid the letter on the table, and smoothed it out with trembling fingers. As he sank back, his face showed drawn and pallid against the purple-red of the chair. His eyes were fixed upon the graying ashes in the grate; but they saw nothing.

So this was the end. He seemed to have known it all along now. In a vault of his subliminal consciousness this ghost had been shut up; now it had burst its cerements and would not down. No, never again!—*Doomed!*

“By that one word hitting the center of a boundless sorrow.”

George was doomed! He could not quite take it in yet; his mind felt too numb to grasp it; but he knew that it was so. With the acceptance of the fact he seemed to feel the clods of the grave falling on himself. He had accepted long ago with calmness the relinquishment of individual immortality; but all the more he had clung to the idea of race-perpetuation and the continuance by one of his line of the work which he had begun. This alone seemed to make it

worth while by lending a semblance of permanence to what was otherwise but the shadow of a moth's wing outlined for a moment against the light.

George doomed! Suddenly a rush of human tenderness drove out all abstract reasoning. His boy lost, gone forever, perhaps even now while he sat passive there in his arm-chair. Unconsciously his lowered eyes fell upon the decoration on his coat. How full of meaning it had been but an hour ago! How empty now! He was a physician and had not been able to save his own child! A wave of remorse swept over the man and buried him in its bitter depths. Alas! it was not skill that had been lacking, but will. His life had made its own channels and would not let itself be diverted by an inch. He had meant that his son's life, too, should be merged in the same current and swell its volume before it reached the sea. He had neglected the boy. He had shut his eyes to danger until it was too late — *too late!* The thought stung him beyond endurance. He rose hastily, and unpinning the decoration from his breast, held it in his hand over the table, where the light of the lamp fell full upon its glittering circle. There it lay — the symbol of the success for which he had sacrificed everything, which had seemed so tangible, so full, so

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satisfying, and now was turned to a child's toy in his hand. Work and fame he had coveted for his portion, and they had fallen to his share in abundance, yet hope lay dead in his heart. What was it all worth to him now? His son, his only son, was the sacrifice.

The twenty years of splendid activity which had loomed glorious before him looked now like a twenty-mile pilgrimage, each mile marked by a gravestone.

The clock on the mantel ticked dully on, then gathered itself with a whirring effort, struck three, and stopped.

XV

ON THE TERRACE

“There is a war against ourselves going on within every one of us.”

GEORGE NEWTON was better; that is, he was experiencing one of those rallies which elate the patient and torture the onlookers with a renewal of their forsworn hope. All day the boy had been at ease and happy, and as Mrs. Blythe, with the Bishop and Fleming, sat down to dinner, the strains of his violin floated down to them from the room above.

It was a somewhat somber party which gathered round the table, Anne's black lace gown affording no relief to the dullness of the men's dress. But as if to balance their somber habit, the table at which they sat burgeoned and bloomed with color. Candelabra of Venice glass held pink lights, which duplicated themselves in the cluster of roses in the center. Plates of Ginori ware blended their cream and orange and blue, and wine-glasses held up by opalescent dragons bubbled with their amber burden.

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"George is certainly better," said the Bishop.

"He seems better. I am glad to have his father find him so when he comes," Fleming answered.

"Well, for my part," Anne answered, "I am not at all concerned about Mr. Newton's feelings. They do not seem to be of a particularly tender variety, and I don't see why we should wish to spare him his share of the anxiety that we have all been going through."

"Newton has feelings, plenty of them," expostulated Fleming, who made a fetish of loyalty to his friends, "but they have had no chance to develop. His devotion to science has been like a prairie fire, sweeping everything before it and killing off all the domestic affections.—You are smiling, Mrs. Blythe."

"Was I? Yes, I believe I was."

"At me, perhaps."

"Why, now that you mention it, I think it must have been at you."

"Was my absurdity general or particular?"

"Oh, it was the phrase 'domestic affections' which struck me as funny coming from you. You always seem so—so detached. I think of you as a pendulum swinging between your club and your office."

"A pendulum! Is that a desirable thing to be?"

"Evidently," Mrs. Blythe answered, still smiling, when a cough faintly heard made Fleming start from his chair; but the Bishop stretched out a detaining hand.

"Giulio is with him. He will call you if you are needed."

"Yes," added Anne, "and the boy has seemed so well all day!"

"You think him better, honestly?"

"Don't you?"

"I wish I dared to."

"What a coward you are in hoping!"

Anne smiled at him as she spoke, and he answered her with a look. To the Bishop he said:

"My reason tells me that I ought not to wish George to come back to that invalidism which is all that the poor boy could hope for — that half-health which brings duties and denies strength to meet them."

"But," said Anne, determined to break up Fleming's despondency, "think how much of the world's work has been done by invalids! If I ever lose my health, I shall flaunt my invalidism in the face of the world as a badge of distinction. I shall adopt a coat of arms — a hot-water bottle couchant and a plaster rampant, quartered with a mortar and pestle, and for a motto — quick — give me a motto,

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uncle—what's the Latin for 'Grin and bear it'?"

"*Ridete et sursum corda*," suggested the Bishop. Then they all laughed and Anne had succeeded in her purpose.

"Think of the pedigree of invalidism! What an aristocracy we could select from our invalid ancestors!" the Bishop continued.

"Yes," Fleming assented; "we might have Cæsar and Napoleon for rulers and Hood and Heine for their jesters.—Heine, there's an invalid hero for you!—Do you think, Bishop, if you were given your choice, you would rather be a healthy, hearty, full-blooded day-laborer or a Heine in his mattress-grave?"

"Heine!" said the Bishop; "without a moment's hesitation I should say Heine. Why, of course; there would be the lucid intervals, you see, when pain relaxed its grasp, and these would offset years of stolid physical comfort. The mind must dominate the body."

"But then," ventured Fleming, with his characteristic smile, which never failed to dislodge his glasses, "you must not forget that the laborer would probably stand a better chance of heaven. Your profession binds you, I suppose, to place soul as far above mind as you place mind above body."

"H'm!" said the Bishop, lifting his wine-glass, and looking at the light through it with half-shut eyes and head a little on one side. "Socially the virtues are everything; sociologically they are not. History asks not, was a man impeccable, but was he imperial — what did he *do*? Napoleon is a code and a unified France. Heine is no longer a libertine and a scoffer; he is a bundle of lyrics and epigrams."

"Cleverly evaded, but not answered," said Fleming to himself, and he resolved to prod the Bishop a little further.

"You think, then, that a man may ignore his private morality if he sees his way to accomplishing some marked public service — that genius supersedes the decalogue."

"How do you know that I think so? I have n't said so."

"Excuse me," said Fleming; "I thought it was the inevitable inference from your last remark."

The Bishop, thus brought to bay, adopted the oblique method of defense and attack combined.

"You see, Anne," he said, turning to Mrs. Blythe, "Mr. Fleming would rob conversation of its delightful irresponsibility, and substitute a series of just and dreary observations by introducing legal methods into social intercourse."

He butchers the half-truth to make a legal holiday."

"Yes, uncle, and the half-truth is very agreeable, is n't it? We feel so clever in supplying the other half! Whereas a whole truth bowls us over and leaves us no recourse but tame acquiescence, or eccentric defiance of the obvious. When you lawyers kill the half-truth, Mr. Fleming, you kill conversation."

"Now, Mrs. Blythe!" exclaimed Fleming, with deprecating eyebrows, "have I deserved this — to be called a prig under guise of being called a lawyer, a soft impeachment which I cannot deny?"

Before Anne could reply, the Bishop, who was quite satisfied to slip out so easily from the conversational coil in which he had found himself entangled, blandly suggested coffee on the terrace.

"I must go back to George," said Fleming, with a sting of compunction.

"No," the Bishop said, rising; "I shall sit with George. Coffee keeps me awake, and I have not strength of mind enough to forego it except under the incentive of a benevolent motive."

Fleming felt that he, too, lacked strength of mind to decline either the coffee or the moonlight tête-à-tête on the terrace with Anne. So he only

said, "Thank you," to the Bishop, and followed his hostess through the long window to the little table where the red-coated serving-men were already setting the coffee-tray, lighting the alcohol lamp, and laying out the tobacco and rice-paper. He sank back into the lounging-chair and watched with a sense of physical content the motion of Mrs. Blythe's slender fingers as they rolled the cigarettes and laid them in a deft row on his side of the table. The diamond on her left hand caught the sparkle of the alcohol flame and blazed like an answering fire. Her head was bent, and his eye noted the curls at the base of her small head where it joined the neck.

"Is she a beautiful woman?" he asked himself, and remembered a time when he would have said "No" quite positively. Now he found himself thinking, if this were not beauty, so much the worse for beauty. There is a charm which can afford to smile at any appraisal of the value of features. Is the nose straight by rule, is the mouth of undue width, the chin too pointed? What does it all matter when a smile can rob men of the power to judge?"

For these few days in which fate had thrown them together Fleming had resolved to give himself up to this woman's spell, to live in the light of her eyes and the lilt of her voice. For

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one week he would bask in her presence and drift; after that he would take control of himself once more, man the helm, and steer for safer waters.

Anne was agreeably aware that she was being watched and that she bore watching. The laziness of Fleming's look gave a sense of tranquillity and robbed her of apprehension, yet it told unmistakably of appreciation, and hinted at something beyond.

"We forgot Keats, did n't we, among our invalids?" Anne said, taking up the dinner-table talk once more as she poured the coffee into the tiny cups with their setting of filigree silver.

"Yes, we forgot Keats."

"That is curious."

"Curious? I don't see that. We could n't think of every one. Why of him more than another?"

"Because you always make me think of that friend of his—Severn, was n't it? I can imagine you doing just what Severn did. In his place you'd have thrown over your profession and gone to Rome and nursed Keats till he died, just as you're doing with George Newton."

"Why, yes, of course, if he'd been my friend. So would you."

Anne narrowed her eyelids till the eyelashes

almost met. "Perhaps," she said doubtfully, "if he were a genius and I knew it, and knew that I should be immortalized in the 'Adonais.' Otherwise not; it is n't in me."

Fleming reached forward and took another cigarette. The darkness fell broodingly. The moon climbed slowly over the hill opposite.

At last Anne spoke abruptly.

"I am going home next month."

"Yes?"

"Not home to New York, you know. It would be hot and and rather dreary, and I have not courage enough yet to face that house and all its associations. No; I mean to write and have them open Driftwood. You know Mr. Blythe bought that the year before he died."

"Yes," said Fleming again.

"And I have done something else."

"Something very radical and startling, by your tone."

"It is, and I dare say I shall be awfully sorry for it by and by; but it is you who are responsible."

"I!"

"You."

"Explain, please."

"I call it obnoxious to be as good as you are. It sets such an uncomfortable standard."

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“Yes, my judgments are so kindly and my social relations so easy and genial!”

“They are n’t, are they? I’ve thought of that, and tried to take comfort, but I can’t. I see clearly that it’s only doing good to people that gives you a right not to like them—and so—and so—”

“And so you’ve sent for the child?”

“Yes.”

“I knew you would. You, being you, could n’t help it. Still, it’s taking a great risk. I’m afraid you’re right in saying that you will be sorry.”

“Very likely; but you don’t know quite what I mean to do. I could n’t keep him with me. You don’t think I ought to do that?”

“I should think it the most foolish thing you could possibly do.”

“I don’t know. I suppose some women are good enough to do it. I’m not. But I mean to take the responsibility of bringing up the boy, giving him an education and a start in the world. My maid has a sister who lives in New Hampshire, under the shadow of Monadnock. She has promised to care for the child, and she is to be trusted. Of course, when he is older, we must do something else; but I don’t need to decide that now. You think that is doing my duty?”

“I do, Mrs. Blythe, I truly do,” Fleming answered earnestly. “I should be surprised at your doing so much if I had not been watching you all these weeks and seeing how you do your duty with one hand and shake your fist at it with the other. Do you know, a year ago I thought you perhaps needed — forgive me for being impertinent enough to speculate about you — but I thought the discipline of unhappiness might be good for you; and here you’ve come by every wish of your heart, and prosperity has done as much for you as adversity ever did for the most unhappy-go-unlucky wight in the world. It’s a comfort to see things work like that once in a while. Now, look at all you’ve been doing for George.”

“Nothing at all — absolutely nothing.”

“Too much by far. You are overtaxing your strength; but it will not be for long. If Newton arrives to-night, as he should, or even to-morrow morning, we can leave next day, and take George by easy stages to Genoa, giving him a rest at Pisa and again at Spezia before the steamer sails. Newton telegraphed that he would start for home at once.”

“You are in a hurry to be off.”

“In a way I am. I feel this trespassing on your hospitality; but I can’t regret it when I see what it has done for George.”

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"You are not going back to America with them?"

"No; I have business in Paris next month, and it would be crossing the ocean to take the next steamer back again; but I must go as far as Genoa and see George safely on board ship."

"But his father will be with him."

"Yes; another reason why I ought to go. A gift for cellular psychology does not imply a knowledge of ticket-buying and luggage-checking."

"You could not be persuaded to stay over a day and join them at Genoa?"

Fleming flicked the ashes from his cigarette with his little finger. It gave him an instant to reflect on his reply.

"It is a triumph of hospitality to suggest it," he said, "after all the bother we've given you; but I must not let myself think of it. You see, I'm only a nuisance here, and George really needs me."

"Yes," said Anne, reluctantly; "I suppose he does, and my need of you is quite frivolous."

Fleming tossed away his cigarette and leaned forward, throwing his face into the light. It was tense and lined.

"Your 'need,' did you say?"

"Need is a strong word to apply to a horse-

back ride. The fact is that ever since I've been here I've been longing to ride to Vincigliata — the castle, you know, back here on the hills, that a rich Englishman has been restoring to all its middle-agedness, even to spits and donjon keys. Now, my absurd uncle won't consent to my going with the groom, and it would be cruelty to ask him to go himself; so, you see, I thought perhaps you would n't mind sacrificing yourself. But it is really of no consequence, for, whatever Uncle Lawrence may say, I shall go with the groom."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Fleming. "The Bishop is quite right in protesting — over these roads with untried horses —"

"They're not untried," said Anne. "Some English people had the villa last year, and I fancy the horses were broken to saddle then. Luigi says that two of them have a very fair gait, and there's a third which pounds along after a fashion."

"You really mean to go?"

"Certainly."

"Then, with your permission, I shall change my mind and accept your invitation to stay over a day."

"No, no, you must n't. George would miss you."

"Let him."

"Dr. Newton could n't get on without you."

"No matter."

"I am quite ashamed to have asked it."

"Mrs. Blythe," said Fleming, looking at her with a dominant eye, "let this be understood between us, please. Your lightest wish counts with me more than all the needs and wishes of the rest of the world. Now, don't let us ever refer to the subject again."

As he finished, a sound of wheels was heard.

"Newton!" exclaimed Fleming, rising quickly, "and high time, too."

"Yes, it was Newton who descended heavily from the carriage at the gate — Newton; but so changed, so broken, that Fleming had difficulty in recognizing him, and even Anne forgave him much as she looked at his worn, white face. As for him, he took their hands absently as if neither they nor he were real.

"May I see George? Is he awake?" he asked.

"You will not have some supper before you see him?"

"No; please take me to him."

The door of George's room stood open, and the Bishop was reading by the light of a shaded night-lamp. He bowed gravely to Newton as

he entered, but did not attempt to speak for fear of disturbing the sleeping boy.

Newton walked to the bed and stood looking down at the sunken cheek, the drawn lips, the damp straggling hair.

He attempted no word of speech—simply looked and looked and looked.

Anne and the Bishop went out softly and closed the door.

XVI

AT SANTA CROCE

“One task more declined — one more foot-path untrod.”

NO one except a baby is so much missed from a household as an invalid. If we wish to be necessary to people we must let them do for us.

George Newton's departure had cast a gloom over the whole of the Villa Piacevole. The sympathetic Italian servants went about with red eyes. “*Il poverino!*” murmured one. “*Ma, cuor forte rompe cattiva sorte!*” They had been much impressed with George's courage and cheerfulness, and now they stood at the door of his empty, silent room, awed as if there had been a funeral.

Mrs. Blythe herself felt the depression that comes of relaxed effort. There seemed of a sudden to be no occupation for her time. Of what use to arrange flowers? Every one of the household now was strong enough to go out of doors and look at the tangled poppy banks and tulip

beds on the hillside. Why coop up a dozen tulips in a vase when nature spread her lavish thousands in the open?

No more ordering of delicate invalid's dishes; no gathering of news to beguile the sick-room hours. Time hung heavily on her hands. Moreover, it would be worse instead of better, for tomorrow Fleming was going, and beyond that event Anne did not care to look.

Meanwhile, at least there was the ride. As she came down the stairs dressed for it in her closely fitted riding-dress, held tightly around her above the little booted feet, she saw her uncle, in the hall below, drawing on his gloves and tucking his gold-headed cane under his arm. He looked at her not wholly approvingly as he noted her riding-dress.

"So you are determined on this ride?" he said.

"Yes; why not?"

"It is so — so noticeable. People don't do it here."

"But people are going to do it this afternoon. 'That's the way this duchess walks.'"

"Anne, you are obstinate, and obstinacy is not pleasing in women."

"No," said his niece, taking the edges of his coat in both hands and smiling into his face; "only in bishops!"

The Bishop had eaten an indigestible luncheon and was a bit out of temper; therefore he was led to say abruptly and explosively what he had been meaning to say sometime judicially and tactfully.

“Anne, you have had an overdose of freedom. You need to marry.”

Mrs. Blythe gave a short little laugh.

“It makes marriage sound very attractive, certainly, this opposition to liberty!”

“Nevertheless, it is exactly what I mean. You should marry a man of sound sense and strong character, who would rule you not so much by force of will as by force of a superiority to which you could not help bowing.”

Anne swept him a salute with her riding-crop.

“Have you selected the person?”

“No; I have only selected the type. That is as far as a guardian is justified in going.”

“How would young Hawtree Campbell suit you?”

“A fop, a fribble, who divides his time between Vienna and the hunting-field.”

“But his estates have the dust of time on them, and the dust of time is the one thing which my money has not yet been able to buy. Well, then, if you don't like him, there is the Personage. I have been given to understand

that my graces would add luster to the ranks of the Italian aristocracy."

"If I were you, Anne," said the Bishop, dryly, "I should count that offer out. When the terms of the will are known, I suspect insuperable obstacles—difference of religion, etc.—will arise. I have seen such things happen; love undergoes a gold-cure."

"Uncle Lawrence, you are not flattering to your niece's attractions; but if my charms really depend wholly on gold, I don't see but I am forced back on Tom Yates."

"Yates! I'd rather see you buried than married to him."

"Please don't talk about Tom—you don't understand him. He is n't your kind, but he is a thoroughly good fellow for all that; at least, I am fond of him in a curious way."

"Don't tell me, Anne, that you are one of those women who think that they can reform men by marrying them!"

"I'm not sure that I could n't. But if you don't like him, there is no one left but Mr. Walford."

"Well, women *are* blind!" The Bishop threw back the remark as he left the room.

Mrs. Blythe did not appear to be greatly perturbed by his contempt. She walked to the

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buhl table, on which stood a vase of roses, and drawing out one, was pinning it to her dress when Fleming came in from the stable, where he had been inspecting the girth of the side-saddle with some anxiety. Like most spare, square men, he looked well in his corduroys and riding-boots.

"Will you wear a rose in your buttonhole, too?" asked Mrs. Blythe.

"Thank you," said Fleming, and drew near to Anne, as she sorted the flowers. While she was busy fastening the rose in his coat, he stood with hands behind him, carefully staring over her head at the wall beyond; but it did him no good, for a mirror hung there and reflected him and her standing close together, wearing what bore a fantastic likeness to bridal favors. Every nerve in him thrilled, the color rose in his cheek and a light in his eyes; but he bit his lips to keep back the words that rushed to them. Men fancy, poor, simple things, that all is well if they give their emotions no words, as if words were not the least of the signs by which a woman interprets their feeling for her.

"Do men ever care how they look?" asked Mrs. Blythe, standing back with appreciative scrutiny in her eyes.

"No; as a rule, they care more how the woman with them looks, which is fortunate."

Anne smiled. She liked a man who took his cue.

"Shall we go?" she suggested. "I see the horses are at the door."

Half-way down the hill they passed the Bishop. Anne waved her hand airily.

"Don't worry about us, uncle," she called out as they passed. "The worst that can happen is to have 'Inglesi' shouted at our heels."

Anne's horse shied a little, and Fleming caught the bridle.

"The horses are hard-bitted, but safe enough. I shall take care of her," he said in answer to the Bishop's anxious glance.

"I am sure of it," the Bishop answered, and started onward more placidly. His plan was to walk down the hill and through the city as far as Santa Croce, where the sharp lights promised a good view of the frescos, and then to drive home. He looked after the two figures on horse-back somewhat wistfully, and yet he was not in the least depressed at the prospect of his solitary afternoon. He was no longer young, and Anne's conversational pace sometimes put him out of breath. Besides, as he grew older he became more and more interested in what was true versus what was clever. Having no divining-rod to show him truth, he was compelled to dig for

it, and digging for truth is a solitary, pioneer process. It cannot be done in gangs.

Moreover, under the surface of worldliness in the Bishop's character there lay a foundation of genuine piety, which made it a pleasure to meditate alone in the dim silence of these Old World churches and give himself up to the sacred associations of the place.

He particularly looked forward to seeing the Franciscan frescos alone. Nothing made him realize his age as much as the art criticism which he heard about him. It was the jargon of a new generation — a *patois* not to be learned late in life. For himself, he was contented to enjoy the pictures without knowing whether they were in the artist's early or later manner, or by whom the restorations had been made. In fact, he found it difficult to leave his profession behind him, and he caught himself making surreptitious notes in a little red book concerning the spiritual impressions left by certain paintings; and this, as every one knows, bespeaks the barbarian in art.

To-day, as Santa Croce's brown coolness fell on him, it put him in mind of the mantle of St. Francis. He felt himself calmed and tranquilized, yet quickened in spirit, as if by actual contact with that sweetest of all the saints. Gradually he fell to brooding over the life of Francis,

the place of asceticism in the modern world, the relative rights of self-sacrifice and self-development — what were the limits of each ?

He stood in the Capello Bardi and looked up at the picture of the saint giving his cloak to a beggar, and leaving his father's house to wed with poverty. How medieval in its passionately simple conception of duty! The Bishop felt the modern longing for that age of uncomplexity and conviction. What terrors had loneliness or poverty or death for the soul sure of its mission?

“After all,” said the Bishop to himself, “the influence of a great and generous enthusiasm is not to be measured by its direct results. It is like a cross set up to mark a well in the desert. Many travelers who may never taste of the waters yet see the cross in the distance and uncover their heads in prayer.”

With this his eyes fell, and in falling struck full on Stuart Walford.

Neither of the men was in the mood for an interview, but the recognition had been too palpable. Walford closed his Baedeker and moved across to the spot where the Bishop was standing. He came forward smiling, and with the slight backward toss of the head which was a characteristic gesture with him.

“Good afternoon,” he said. “I suppose you

came here, as I did, hoping for a good 'light on the frescos. They 're interesting, don't you think, in spite of being such palpable restorations?"

"I was not criticizing," answered the Bishop — "not criticizing or even appreciating. I was reflecting."

"Yes, that 's all one can do when the light is so bad. Disappointing, is n't it?"

"Rather."

"Santa Croce is jealous of the sun."

"It does seem so."

This was the first conversation which these two men had had alone together since that day in the Bishop's study. At such a meeting there is no medium between confidence and commonplace. Both minds are too full of vital things. They must either speak or wear a mask.

Bishop Alston always refrained, on principle, from meddling in other people's spiritual affairs. He held that it was not the office of a bishop to go about with his crozier in the collar of society. "After all, I do not keep a black-sheep ranch," he was accustomed to say. Yet, strangely enough, this reticence of his impelled confidences. There is nothing that men love so much as talking of themselves, especially to those who are not over-eager to hear.

“You know what month this is, Bishop?”
Walford began with heightened color.

“Certainly; April.”

“And have you any recollection of me and my affairs connected with that date?”

“Oh, yes,” the Bishop answered calmly; “this was the time agreed upon, eighteen months ago, for your final decision in regard to your mission to the lepers at Molokai. Have you made it?”

“Bishop Alston,” Walford answered, “I feel that I can never thank you enough for your counsel. I came to you a raw boy, full of a boy’s enthusiasm and a boy’s unpractical ideals.”

“I suppose that all ideals are unpractical.”

“Yes,” Walford went on smoothly; “ideals are given to us as stars to light our course. We must not try to carry them as lanterns.”

“I don’t think I meant exactly that,” the Bishop dissented mildly.

“Oh, I quite understood you,” said Walford; “and in looking back I understand the mingled pity and amusement with which you must have regarded me and my wild scheme.”

“Indeed, no! I never respected any man more.”

“Ah, that is like you, Bishop. You look to the motive and forgive the crudeness of the act. But your advice was excellent. I have acted

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upon it to the letter, and the result is what you of course foresaw."

"You have given up the mission?"

"Yes; that was a foregone conclusion from the moment when I realized my own powers and their true sphere."

The Bishop nodded. He did not trust himself to speak.

"I have stood in the pulpit there at St. Simeon's," Walford continued, "and I have seen that great audience swayed by the words it was given me to speak. Through me ten thousand agencies for good have been stirred and set in motion; the rich men have given of their plenty and the poor of their scanty store; the young men have pressed forward to help in my work, and the mothers have brought their babes to the font to be consecrated by me to God. They have begged me with tears in their eyes to help them in their sacred charge of rearing their children. When I realize all these things, I feel that I have known the highest happiness possible to man."

"And the lepers—do you still have the vision of them on their lonely island?"

"Yes; it still haunts me at times. I think of them with infinite pity and sadness; but I try to shut out the thought as much as possible, for nothing so unmans one for the every-day duties

as allowing one's imagination to dwell on ills too far off to be helped, and which do not rightfully fall within his line of activity. It is a form of self-indulgence, and nothing wrecks a career like self-indulgence."

"Nothing," assented the Bishop, dryly.

"I had a letter to-day from Dr. Milner," Walford continued. "If I had had any doubts about my course before, this would have put an end to them, it is such a clear pointing of the finger of Providence."

"Sometimes I think," said the Bishop to himself, "that the finger of Providence must be set on a swivel, it points in so many different directions."

"Perhaps you would like to read the letter," Walford volunteered.

The Bishop shook his head.

"Thank you, but my eyes will not serve me in this half-twilight. I shall be glad to have you tell me as much as you will of its contents."

Walford looked a trifle crestfallen. The letter was highly complimentary, and compliments to one's self are difficult to transmit through one's own lips.

"Dr. Milner writes," went on Walford, after a moment's hesitation, "that my success last winter convinced him of my ability to carry on his

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work; that he has talked with the vestrymen, and that they agree upon calling me in his place when he resigns, as he intends to do next January."

"Dear old Milner!" interpolated the Bishop. "How we shall miss him, and what a noble life his has been!"

"Yes, yes. As I was saying, when he resigns next January I am to have the call — an extraordinary thing for so young a man, I see you think, and so it is, but all the more gratifying for that, and I shall always feel that I owe all that I am to you and your counsel."

"Oh, I hope not!" exclaimed the Bishop, and then added somewhat lamely: "You must regard your success as wholly due to your own temperament and talents. I should not be justified in accepting an iota of the credit."

"But I shall insist upon giving it."

"Don't, please; for credit implies responsibility."

"Ah, you think that I may not live up to the record I have made so far?"

"On the contrary, I am sure you will."

The Bishop was apparently about to say more; but just then the bell of the Campanile sounded its four strokes.

Walford looked at his watch deprecatingly.

"I am sorry," he said, "but I have an engagement with Miss Yates at four."

"You are already late then," the Bishop answered, conscious of a marked relief. "Are you to be in Florence for some time longer?"

"No; I leave Florence for Geneva to-morrow, and as I fear I shall not have time to go to Fiesole, I shall, if I may, ask you to be the bearer of my farewells to Mrs. Blythe. Tell her, please, that I expect to sail from Naples, and so I shall hope to see her when I pass through Florence again."

"Certainly; I will convey your farewells with pleasure," said the Bishop, and then was aware that the reply had not been exactly felicitous. The younger man, however, was too self-absorbed to be conscious of a secondary meaning in the words. He held out his hand, which the Bishop took, and then both men bowed and parted.

"Now, I wonder," said the Bishop to himself, as he watched Walford disappearing down the long aisle—"I wonder why I feel as if I had heard the death-sentence of a soul. After all, what is it that Walford is about to do? To accept a call to one of the most important and influential churches in the country. Is that a tragic destiny?" Then Jean Paul's words floated through his mind: "Tragic destiny is the long-reverberating mountain-echo of a human discord."

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“That ’s it,” he murmured; “that ’s it! It is what a man might have been which jars on what he is. When a man has once stood on the Mount of Vision, when he has once heard the call of God to his soul and has made answer, ‘Here am I,’ he can never go back to dwell in the valley of commonplace. The miasma there, to which ordinary men have become immune, is deadly to him. It will kill Walford.— I wonder if I did right.”

XVII

HOW IT HAPPENED

*"I will ride until the end,
Half your lover,—all your friend."*

IT was one of those Tuscan April days when the earth is pied with violets, and the air is like heady Greek wine, and one carries the goblet of life steadily lest a single precious drop be spilled untasted.

Mrs. Blythe and Fleming came out from the Vincigliata castle; but ignoring their horses, which the groom was holding on the plateau before the postern-gate, they turned and walked in the direction of a knoll commanding a view of hill and valley, pine forest and olive slope, and the lazy outline of the distant hills.

Fleming looked at Anne, and thought he had never seen her so young, so spirited, so tingling with vitality. He felt his own heightened by the companionship.

"Why is it," Anne was saying, as they reached

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the foot of the knoll, "that a restoration like this Vincigliata here leaves us cold, where the merest stump of a ruin can give us quite an emotion?"

"I fancy," Fleming said, "it is because association is a highly volatile essence and must be kept in the original bottle; it escapes in the transfer. And then we Anglo-Saxons begrudge our emotions, anyway. We are willing to part with them for a fair equivalent, but we will not consent to be cheated out of a penny's worth."

"I understand that feeling perfectly."

"Naturally. You are an Anglo-Saxon, and cannot escape your inheritance. We all get heartaches from a repression which these Latins never know."

"I am tired," said Anne. "Shall we sit down here where we get the view?"

She threw aside her riding-crop and seated herself in a little clearing under the shadow of a group of pines. Claspings her knees with her hands, she sat gazing hard in front of her—at what? Fleming wondered as he lounged on the carpet of pine-needles at her feet and looked at the landscape because he did not dare to look at Anne.

From the distance came the clear flute-call of a nightingale. The sound gave Mrs. Blythe a sense of freedom, it was so strange, so alien, like this silent, austere landscape, which seemed no

part of her life. She felt as if she and the man beside her had drifted away from the conventions of every-day existence into a still pool where only heaven was reflected. In such surroundings much might be ventured.

Anne gathered a handful of the brown pine-needles and let them slip slowly through her fingers. At last she said:

“Have you seen anything of Mr. Walford lately ?”

“As much as I cared to see.”

“How much ?”

“Nothing at all.”

“You don’t find him particularly sympathetic, do you ?”

“No; our vices are too dissimilar.”

A pause followed. Fleming broke it saying:

“And you? Have you seen Mr. Walford often ?”

“Once or twice only.”

“And that feeling of which you spoke on the night of the musicale — has it grown any more tangible ?”

Anne laughed a nervous little laugh.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you about that. It died a natural death; that is, if anything can die which has never existed.”

“Never existed ?”

"No. That 's the curious part of it. I understand it all now — how I made up an ideal out of qualities, some of them Mr. Walford's, some of them imaginary, and some of them belonging to another person entirely. I called them all his, and was ready to fall down before them; but one day the veil fell from the real Mr. Walford, and he did n't fit the ideal at all. It was as if you 'd fallen in love with a picture, and found the original quite different."

"It must have been a cruel disappointment."

"Why, no. Queerly enough, it was n't a disappointment, for I found, to my own surprise, that I did n't care — that I had never really cared."

Fleming drew a deep breath of relief.

"I am more thankful than I can express," he said at length. "You would never have been happy with Walford; but I was desperately afraid you might deceive yourself till it was too late."

"Why did you say nothing then?"

"I had no right to speak, in the first place, and, besides, I knew that I was not an impartial judge."

"Mr. Fleming," said Anne, suddenly, "have you a sound mind and a strong character?"

"Decidedly not."

Mrs. Blythe was secretly disappointed. She had hoped that he would inquire why she asked, and she had her answer ready. As it was, she only observed weakly :

“Oh, I thought perhaps you had.”

“Nothing of the sort. If I ever flattered myself with any such delusions, I have been thoroughly undeceived of late. I knew I ought to leave Florence, and yet I stayed—does that look like a sound mind? I resolved not to take this ride to-day, and here I am—is that an evidence of a strong character? I assure you, my will is made of jelly, mush, cream-pie—whatever is most a synonym for weakness and instability.”

Mrs. Blythe took up her riding-crop and poked energetically at the ground with it. Fleming watched her proceedings idly.

“What are you doing?” he asked, smiling.

“Digging a grave for Cock-Robin?”

“Perhaps,” Anne answered absently, “or perhaps I am burying a few scruples.”

“Let me help you!” exclaimed Fleming, with alacrity. “I have a private graveyard of my own for interments of that sort. My mind is full of such mounds—quite humpy with them.”

A long pause, then Mrs. Blythe began in a rather nervous, low-pitched voice :

“Mr. Fleming—”

“Present.”

“Were you ever in love?”

Fleming had that twin quality of brooding melancholy, a delicately balanced sense of humor. It was struck and set vibrating by Anne's words. He gave her one quick, amused upward glance as he answered:

“Mrs. Blythe, you embarrass me!”

“No doubt; but were you?”

“Perhaps.”

“Did you ever offer yourself to any one?”

“You would strip the veil of privacy from the most sacred emotions of the human soul.”

“Very likely; but did you?”

“Yes.”

“What did you say?”

“Must I tell?”

“I am afraid you must. It's quite necessary.”

Fleming appeared to be giving his whole attention to filling Cock-Robin's grave with pine-needles, while Anne reclapsed her hands about her knees and leaned back against a tree-trunk in a listening attitude.

There was a tenderness of reminiscence in Fleming's voice when he spoke at last.

“Well, then, as nearly as I can remember, I said, ‘Susan, let us build a little house in the

garden and go and live in it. I will be the husband and fetch bread and butter from my kitchen if you will be the wife and bring jam and cream from yours.' I was seven and she was six, and our gardens adjoined, which was convenient; but I blush to this day to think what a lion's share of the providing I imposed upon poor Susan."

A smile trembled across Anne's lips.

"An excellent proposal," she said, "brief and businesslike.— Mr. Fleming—"

"What is it, Mrs. Blythe?"

"Suppose *we* build a little house in the garden. You might be the husband and I—that is, if I were urged—"

Silence, blank silence, broken only by the note of the nightingale in the branches above them. Anne leaned forward till she could see Fleming's face, which had been kept carefully turned away from her. It was white to the lips. If it had been anything but that, she would have sunk through the earth. As it was, she leaned back contentedly and patted the gold chatelaine bag which hung at her belt.

"Is this a farce or a fairy-story?" Fleming said at last. His voice sounded hoarse and forced.

"Neither. It is a plain, straightforward offer

of marriage. Now I have spoken out like a man, and it is open to you to adopt the woman's rôle and tell me that, while you entertain sentiments of the highest respect and esteem for me, you have not that feeling which would justify you in accepting my flattering offer. Go on!"

Fleming jumped up and began to pace the walk before her. His whole nature was in revolt. His feelings and his will were engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the mastery. At last he folded his arms and said, looking fixedly into the distance :

"Mrs. Blythe, I do not wish to marry you."

"That was not what I told you to say; but perhaps you found my formula too elaborate. It will be enough if you look at me and say, 'Mrs. Blythe, I do not love you.'"

"Mrs. Blythe —"

"No; but look at me."

Fleming turned and looked down at that charming oval face, the arch eyes raised to his, the tremulous lips; then he turned quickly away again.

"I cannot say it," he said low and unsteadily; "you know I cannot. Why do you tempt me? I have fought this battle out with my own heart, and I will not be overcome now — betrayed into an act of which I should be ashamed as long as I live. *Apage Satana!*"

“I am not Satana, and I will not apage,” Mrs. Blythe replied with energy. “Neither am I the victim of my own pride, which I make a fetish and call self-respect.”

Fleming leaned over and took the little gloveless hands away from the knees which they had been clasping. One of these hands he kept close in his while he talked, and Anne could feel the throbbing of that strong clasp.

“Listen, dear,” he said. “You don’t know what you are asking me to do. It is adorable in you to offer this sacrifice. I shall have it to remember all the days of my life. But for me to accept it would be another matter. I should feel like a scoundrel robbing a child of a bag of gold pieces. Good God, Anne! it’s hard enough loving you as I do — don’t make it harder!”

“I am not a child,” said Anne, “and I have counted the cost — my gold pieces are Dead Sea apples. No, frankly, that’s a lie. I like my money immensely, but I like you better; and since I must choose between you, why —”

Fleming shook his head.

“Now let us look at the thing calmly,” Anne went on, as if she had ever looked at anything calmly since she was born. “You think it would be shabby in you to marry me?”

“I *know* it would.”

“And I think it would be shabby in you not to. Perhaps we are neither of us quite impartial judges. Suppose we lay it before the Bishop and agree to accept his decision.”

“To what purpose? Bishop Alston is a man of the world. I know what his point of view must be. Why should I humiliate myself by giving him reason to think me capable of any other?”

“You say my uncle is a man of the world?”

“In the best sense of the word, yes.”

“Very good. Now if he sees nothing wrong, nothing to be objected to, in this course, why should you set yourself up to be a better judge than a bishop and a man of the world?”

Silence fell again. Fleming's stern jaw set itself more firmly than before. His eyes were inscrutable; but Anne Blythe had long made it a rule when she could not understand the language of the eyes to watch the hands. In the relaxing of the clenched fists she read relenting.

“Mr. Fleming—”

No answer.

“Blair— No, no, that was not a challenge! There are limits even to my audacity.”

“And to my self-restraint. Let us go home.”

“And ask the Bishop?”

“Yes, since you wish to see me so humiliated, we will ask the Bishop.”

“Ah, now you are charming.”

“I — charming? I am a miserable weakling. But what do you suppose you are in my eyes? How can I ever hope to tell you?”

“You might try.”

“Not without danger of repeating my indiscretion of a moment ago. Anne, do you think — no matter what the Bishop says — you might let me kiss you once? Thank you. I shall have that to remember. Come what may hereafter, Anne, I shall have that. Let us go!”

Fleming stretched out his hand, and Anne laid hers in his, and so, simply, like two children, they walked down the path together; but when they came in sight of the horses and the groom, the sense of the world and its conventions rushed back upon them, and Anne pulled her hand away, flushing scarlet.

On their homeward ride, however, obliviousness of all the universe fell upon them again. They forgot everything except that they were together. They walked their horses and stopped every once in a while, as if, even at this snail's pace, the ride would be ended too soon.

Now their road lay through dazzling patches of sunshine, now through a stretch of woods as

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dark and mysterious as that where Dante lost his path midway upon the journey of his life. It was all one to them.

Anne's state of mind is easy to describe. She was wildly, exultantly happy, like a gambler who had staked his whole fortune on a single cast and won. For her life had neither past nor future; it was one great absorbing, thrilling *now*.

With Fleming it was different. The happiness was there, but overlaid with doubts, hesitations, questionings, while under all lurked a possible despair. His senses were particularly alert and acute. He could notice every wild flower by the wayside. He could swerve Anne's horse from the pool which the last night's rain had left in the road. And yet nothing seemed real. For him life was all past and future. It was Anne's voice which brought him back to the present.

"Mr. Fleming, when did you fall in love with me?"

"You called me Blair once."

"That was an experiment."

"Could n't you experiment again?"

"Well, then, when did you — Blair?"

"I could n't tell: for my life I could n't. Somewhere in prehistoric ages, I fancy, when I was a savage crying for the moon."

"But in your present incarnation."

"I don't know. In looking back, my life seems only a series of impressions of you, with vacant, meaningless spaces between."

Fleming's horse shied at a rock jutting out from the hillside. When he had mastered it, Mrs. Blythe began once more.

"I don't intend to let you off so. We must get at it by a process of exclusions, I see. You were n't in love with me before my father-in-law died?"

"N-no, I suppose not. What an idiot I must have been not to be!"

"Nor that evening in the library when I sent for you there in New York?"

"Was n't I? I'm not so sure. In fact, I think, if the thing had a beginning, it was then when you leaned forward in the firelight and said how you wanted to be happy. I remember I felt as if it were my own youth pleading with me, and I was conscious of a wild desire that you should be happy, let it cost what it might to any one else; but if I was in love, I did n't know it—not then, or on the steamer when I said good-by; not even when I came over here with George Newton, though now it's as clear as day to me that the desire to see you again was at the bottom of all that."

"Yes; but when did you *know*?"

"I'll tell you: it was the night of your musi-

cale. Walford was there, and he said something to me about you — something that I did n't like ; but, curiously enough, instead of making me more than passingly indignant with him, it turned my thoughts inward. It was like a great globe of light striking me in the eyes, and my head felt queer and my ears rang, and something said, 'You 're in love with her. Don't deny it!'

"How very strange!" said Anne, and repeated under her breath, "How *very* strange!"

"Strange? Not at all; only strange that I should have been blind so long."

"I did n't mean that. I was thinking that it was a curious thing that it should all have come to me on the same evening, and through Mr. Walford, too. He had brought me a letter — one that Renée Jaudon had kept back."

"Yes," interrupted Fleming. "I know all about that, and Walford had read it."

"He had, and I was very angry; but afterward, up in my room, I sat down by my window in the moonlight to think it over. I grew calmer, and presently my resentment faded out. 'After all,' I thought, 'I have no right to be severe toward him. Perhaps any man would have done it.' Then I stopped myself indignantly. 'No; there's one man who would n't have done it. Blair Fleming would n't.' And then — *I knew.*"

XVIII

WHAT THE BISHOP SAID

“Strange all this difference should be
‘Twixt tweedledum and tweedledee.”

MRS. BLYTHE and Fleming had returned from their ride, but had not yet changed their costumes. Anne sat in a lounging-chair, and Fleming sat on the coping of the balustrade, tapping the toe of his boot nervously with his riding-whip, and looking at Anne Blythe as he had never dared to look at her before, with his heart in his eyes.

“Have you always been as beautiful as you are to-day?” he asked at length.

“Always,” Anne replied, with pleasing confidence; “only you had not the wit to see it.”

“I think,” said Fleming, “it was because I was afraid to look at you long enough to form a lasting impression that I never could bring you up before me when I was away from you. I could hear your voice — I have every tone of it by heart; but when I tried to recall your face it

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was blurred, a mere catalogue of chestnut hair, hazel eyes, and little pointed chin. But if I imagined you speaking, then I could see the smile ripple along your lips and the half closing of your eyelids, as if they were trying to keep the fun in your eyes all to themselves. You should smile always, Anne."

"It will be your business in life to see that I have cause to do so," Mrs. Blythe answered, flicking at the dust on her skirt with her riding-crop. "Ah, here comes my uncle up the little path. He must have dismissed the carriage below there somewhere. Shall we say anything to him this afternoon?"

"By all means."

"Perhaps it would be better to wait."

"Not an hour. Suspense is worse than certainty. Do you know, Anne, that scene at Vincigliata begins already to seem like the one beautiful dream of my life, and now—now I am waking and the dream is over."

Tinkle, tinkle, went the Bishop's ring at the gate.

"Now, remember," said Fleming, "whatever his decision may be, we both agree to be bound by it."

"Yes."

"And I am to lay the case before him fairly and squarely?"

“ Yes.”

“ And you will not interfere or interrupt until he has spoken ? ”

“ No.”

“ Don't you think you 'd better go away and let me have it out with him alone ? ”

“ Decidedly, I do not. The matter concerns me as much as it does you, and I should think I might at least be permitted to hear— Do you know, it begins to occur to me that you are quite likely to develop a dictatorial turn of mind when we are married ? ”

“ Don't say 'when'; say 'if.' *When* makes it sound so distractingly possible, and it will be all the harder to give it up in the end. But if you will stay, at least let me move your chair.”

“ No, thank you; I am very comfortable here, where I can see the Duomo and the Bargello— and you.”

“ Yes; but I can see you, too.”

“ Do I offend your esthetic sense ? ”

“ Anne, you are not so much in love as I— you don't know anything about it. When I look at you I wish to give myself up to the full luxury of the occasion. When I have business on hand, and somewhat nervous business at that, it distracts me.”

“ I will keep my veil down if you like.”

“That will be of no use. I shall imagine the face behind it, and I shall become hopelessly confused and inconsecutive—begin a sentence sensibly and end with a foolishness.”

“Nonsense!”

“Yes, I shall—I shall say: ‘My dear Bishop, why do you wear those bewildering little curls in front of your ears, and where did you get that curve to your cheek-line?’ Then your Right Reverend uncle will take me for a lunatic, and very properly refuse to allow his niece to bestow a second thought upon me. For pity’s sake, go! Here comes the Bishop.”

Fleming’s arguments had been singularly ill adapted to produce the effect which he professed to desire. Had he suggested that Anne’s hair was coming down or that the light was trying, he might have accomplished something. As it was, Mrs. Blythe only—well, she did not move any farther away.

“Did you enjoy Santa Croce, Uncle Lawrence?” she said as the Bishop entered, looking rather winded, and dropping heavily into a rush chair near the balustrade.

“Not at all,” was the Bishop’s answer. Clearly his mood was not propitious.

“I am so sorry you were disappointed!”

(She *was* uncommonly sorry.)

“Thank you, my dear.”

“What was the trouble — was the light poor?”

“The light was good enough, but I did not stay long. The fact is, I met Mr. Walford, and he and I talked for some time. After that I found myself not in the humor for sight-seeing; so I only looked at one or two of the frescos, and came home. I shall try again some other day — in the morning, perhaps.”

“So you saw Mr. Walford. Did he inquire for me?”

“No; that is, yes. He sent his compliments and the message that he was leaving for Geneva in a day or two, but should hope to see you when he came back, as he expects to sail from Naples. I had begun to think, Anne, that he was an admirer of yours.”

Fleming saw his chance.

“I am entirely of your opinion, Bishop,” he said. “I think that Mr. Walford not only was, but *is*, an admirer of Mrs. Blythe’s. Indeed, she and I have been talking about him this afternoon.”

“Have you?” said the Bishop. “Anne, my dear, you might order the tea. I dismissed the carriage and took the short cut up the hill, and I find myself rather tired by the climb. I am not so young as I once was.”

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"Very well, uncle," Anne responded; but she did not give the order. Her eyes were fixed anxiously on Fleming, who went on: "Yes, we were talking of Walford, and in that connection of marriage. The truth is that, although our conversation was personal and confidential, I obtained Mrs. Blythe's consent to lay it before you, and she, on her part, agreed to consider herself bound by your decision."

"Ah!" — The Bishop turned sharply that he might face Fleming. He crossed his knees and thrust one hand between them, as was his habit when listening intently.

"As our talk turned somewhat on legal and business matters," Fleming said, "I asked Mrs. Blythe to let me state the case without interruption from her, she being, as you know, not wholly free from impulsiveness."

"I should say not!" the Bishop observed with emphasis.

"Precisely. I see you understand your niece's character perfectly, and realize how possible it would be for her to be led under impulse into doing something which she might greatly regret afterward."

"I can imagine such a possibility."

"Very well; then let me put to you a hypothetical case. Let us suppose a man situated

somewhat as Mr. Walford is, in love with a woman whose situation is like that of Mrs. Blythe, and suppose her to reciprocate his sentiments."

The Bishop glanced swiftly at Anne.

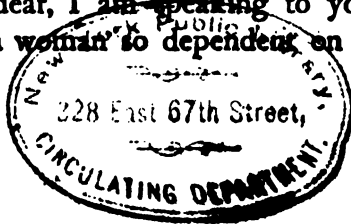
She was blushing, and blushing was rare with her. It meant a great deal. Her uncle felt his heart sink. "And I was so fond of her!" was the thought that flashed through his mind.

"Go on, Mr. Fleming; I am listening," was what he said aloud.

"Pardon me if I find it hard, after all, to put my question all at once. It involves so many things that we have been discussing. The first is this: Is it your opinion that Mrs. Blythe could be happy on the modest competence which would remain to her, by the terms of Mr. Blythe's will, if she entered into this alliance? Could she, that is, give up millions for thousands without a reaction of regret in the years to come?"

The Bishop saw breakers ahead. He rose and took a turn up and down the terrace. When he came back to where the other two were sitting, he wore a troubled look.

"I must answer candidly, Fleming; and Anne, my dear, I am speaking to you, too: I never saw a woman so dependent on money as



you. I cannot imagine you happy living in a small way."

"But, uncle—"

"Pardon me, my dear Mrs. Blythe," Fleming's voice broke in, "but you must not forget that you agreed to be represented by counsel, and under the circumstances you cannot be heard by the court in person. The Bishop has delivered his first decision, and no matter against whom it scores, no exceptions must be taken. Now let us go on. Would you say, Bishop,—of course you understand that this talk is wholly confidential, and frankness is essential,—would you say that for a man in Mr. Walford's circumstances financially to offer himself to Mrs. Blythe, placed as she is, was honorable or even honest?"

The Bishop paused a long while. At length he said:

"I look upon honesty as a high dilution of honor. I could not conscientiously say that I should regard it as any breach of honesty for a man like Walford to ask my niece to marry him; but for a man of sensitive honor, a man like you, Fleming, I should say it would be difficult to bring himself to do it. It must necessarily lay him open to a great deal of unpleasant criticism, and, to say the least, he must have an excellent

opinion of himself to regard his society as an offset to all that he asks her to relinquish."

"I have the honor to agree with you entirely, Bishop. Mrs. Blythe, I think that your uncle has answered all the points submitted."

Fleming's lips wore a smile, but his face was ashen gray. The look of youth was gone out of it. He quietly unpinned the rose from the buttonhole of his coat and let it slip to the pavement. Then he sat looking down at it.

Anne Blythe dropped her riding-crop. With two strides she reached the Bishop's chair. She sank down on the low stool beside it, and leaning her head against the arm, she began to cry; not with the artistic, crystalline tears of Eunice Yates, but with genuine sobs which burst the pinning of her white stock and shook her hat awry.

"Oh, don't you see how you 've mixed up everything!" she said at last, between her sobs. "I said I would agree to be bound by your decision, because I thought I could trust you. I never believed for a moment you 'd take *that* view of it, and you 've always liked him so much!"

"No, Anne; there you are grievously mistaken. From the first moment I saw Stuart Walford here in Florence I distrusted him."

“But it was n’t Mr. Walford he was talking about. It was *himself*—*Blair Fleming*. And he did n’t ask me to marry him—I asked him to marry *me*; and at first he would n’t hear of it at all, and at last he agreed to leave it to you; but he said you’d say just this sort of thing about it. I agreed to it, too, because I thought I knew you; but now you’re so different I take back my promise. You can do that, Mr. Fleming, even in law; you can, if nothing has been done about it. Now I do not agree to abide by my uncle’s decision. It was absurd to think of leaving such a thing to him to decide, anyway, after you and I had decided it once for all over there on the hillside at Vincigliata.”

Bishop Alston was slowly recovering from his bewilderment while Anne Blythe’s tirade was in progress. He laid a calming hand on her trembling ones; but he turned to Fleming with grave and disapproving eyes.

“This is not what I should have looked for from you, Mr. Fleming,” he said. “It is not—not ingenuous.”

Fleming crossed the terrace and seized the Bishop’s hand with a grip which made the prelate wince.

“Forgive me!” he exclaimed, with a stress of compelling emotion in his voice. “I meant no

disrespect, and I had no intention of trapping you in an ambush. I wished only to get your unbiassed opinion, given so clearly that there was no mistaking it—as it has been. I knew that you were a good friend of mine, and that dragging my personality into the situation would embarrass and pain you, while it would not affect the question at issue.”

“But it does affect the question at issue. In fact, it changes the question altogether.” The Bishop spoke with an amount of irritation quite foreign to his character; but in Anne Blythe’s eyes he had never appeared so altogether lovely. She gave an affectionate squeeze to the hand laid on hers.

“If you please, my dear!” said her uncle, withdrawing it hastily. “Mr. Fleming has just disabled one of my hands, and I prefer to keep one, at least, with which to write an essay on ‘The Inscrutable Folly of Lovers.’ As for you, Fleming, up to this time I had mistaken you for a sensible man,—you have all the earmarks of one,—but to-day you are behaving like a fool.”

“Very likely,” said Fleming, with dreary acquiescence in his tone; “but it does n’t matter much, does it, to any one but myself?”

“I should say it mattered a good deal to Anne whether her husband were a fool or not.”

“Then let us hope that she may meet with one of those rare beings on whom the gods have bestowed both brains and money.”

“I don’t know that rich fools are any more common than poor ones,” said the Bishop, more blandly, as he felt his grasp strengthen on the situation. “However, it was not of fools in general, but of one in particular, that we were talking—to be exact, of you, Mr. Fleming. You wish to marry my niece, and you very properly lay the matter before me as her guardian—*in loco parentis*, as it were. Now, why could n’t you do it like a man, over your own name, instead of hiding behind the back of another?”

“All this talk is idle, Bishop,” Fleming answered wearily. “I admit I was a fool in dreaming of marrying Mrs. Blythe, not in loving her,—I shall always be proud of that;—but in not being content to love her without return. To ask for that return was, as you said just now, unworthy of ‘a man of sensitive honor.’”

The Bishop did not answer at once. He rose and paced the terrace, his hands locked behind him, and his head bent as if he were studying the crevices between the bricks. At last he came up behind Anne, and taking her head between his hands, he turned it up and kissed her forehead.

“It occurs to me, Fleming,” he said, “that in

all our discussion we are making very little account of one thing, the will of a wilful woman, which is strong enough to dominate all the logic of man. I scorn to take refuge behind the fact that it was my niece who made the proposal of marriage, for I know her well enough to be sure that she would never have spoken with her lips if you had not first spoken with your eyes and your manner. Is n't that so ?”

“Of course it is: I plead guilty; but Heaven knows I tried my best not to betray myself. I believe, except for these last few days, I could have carried it through.”

“That would have been a fine manly thing to do!” Anne exclaimed scornfully. “I've known many a man who would n't risk a refusal from the woman he was in love with; but you're the only one I ever saw who was afraid of an acceptance.”

“Anne,” expostulated her uncle, “*will* you let me finish ?”

“Yes, yes; go on! I apologize.”

“Very well, then; I wish both you and Mr. Fleming to follow my state of mind, to listen to my retraction. I came away from Santa Croce this afternoon thoroughly out of tune with Stuart Walford. There was a time when I had high hopes of him; but I put him to a test, and he

failed to meet it. He may be — probably is — as good as other men still, but the canker is eating his soul. Well, I had been pondering on all this on my way up the hill, and thinking how, of all the men I had ever known, he was the last whom I should choose to be Anne's husband, when you sprang your trap on me, and I fell into it thoroughly, completely, without a crack or a crevice to escape by. As you sat there I felt a sense of impotent wrath at your superiority, and at Anne for not recognizing it. My feeling colored every word I said.

“I cannot take back all of it even now. I do think Anne will have a hard time to accustom herself, not so much to economies as to the withdrawal of that distinction which great wealth gives. She is a vain creature, is Anne. With a man like Walford her vanity would have grown daily by contact with his; but with you her vanity will be swallowed up in your pride.”

“Yes,” interrupted Anne, “and pride is a much worse vice than vanity; for when you're vain, like me, you wish every one to love and admire you, and so you try to be pleasant; but when you're proud, like you, Mr. Fleming, you just don't care what any one else thinks or how any one else feels, so long as you preserve that precious self-respect of yours.”

“Anne, my dear, this is another digression,” said the Bishop, with authority in his voice. “Let me finish what I was saying to Mr. Fleming. I wish to apologize for the haste and the unworthy motives with which I spoke. I wish him to understand fully that I withdraw from the position that I then took, and I make no effort to preserve my consistency.”

“Uncle, you are a saint. You belong over the altar in one of the cathedrals. It is for us to go down on our knees before you.—But let us begin all over again! I was wrong myself, first of all, in promising not to interrupt; secondly, I was wrong in keeping my promise; finally, I was wrong not to put a stop to the whole argument by announcing that I was determined to marry Blair Fleming whether he consented or not, and no matter what any one else thought about it. *There!* That’s my confession!”

“And mine is this,” said Fleming, tracing a name on the pavement with his stick: “I am in love, fathoms deep in love, and I have no strength to resist. Only I know that I was right to fight against it, and I know that the Bishop’s first decision was just, and I ought to abide by it.”

“Now that is a paltry assertion of your pride,” Anne broke in, “and not a confession at all. Besides, you agreed to be bound by my uncle’s

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final decision, and a man cannot take back his word. That is a woman's privilege."

"Yes, Fleming," said the Bishop, smiling and holding out his hand, having taken the precaution to turn his ring, "you must accept the inevitable, and the inevitable in this case is Anne. God bless you both! And now, for pity's sake, give me some tea."

XIX

HIS HEART'S DESIRE

“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver ; nor he that loveth abundance with increase : this is also vanity.”

“**W**HY do you invite Tom Yates to-night ?” the Bishop asked, looking up from his Procopius, and added : “He does not belong with this set of people at all.”

“I have two reasons for asking him,” Mrs. Blythe answered. “I can’t insult any one else with so late an invitation, and, besides, I want Eunice to know that he was here. She is so patronizing and superior.”

“But she is really superior to her brother.”

“All the more intolerable in her to make it so oppressive. Tom is much better than she, except on the surface. Besides, the note has gone.”

“Then how easy for you to have assented to my opinion !” the Bishop commented.

Anne laughed. They understood each other these two — in spite of blood-relationship.

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Mr. Thomas Yates had an excellent opinion of himself, and as it was founded on thirty-five years of intimate acquaintance, it was certainly entitled to some consideration; yet there were intervals when his confidence waned and when he found that a familiar environment was needed to support his judgment.

On 'Change he was easily a leader, and experienced the exhilaration of his position; but here, in this quiet corner of the Old World, he felt bewildered and depressed by a sense of inadequacy to things which he looked down upon, and yet could not comprehend. The "Girlandagoes" and "Jottos" and things that people over here pretended to find so interesting irritated and piqued him in spite of himself, like a blind pool which he had not been invited to enter, and where all sorts of interesting things might be going on, if he could only discover the secret.

The Bishop and Fleming also added unconsciously to Yates's irritation. It was not that they underestimated him, but that he saw them measuring him by unaccustomed standards, and ignoring the field where his superiority lay. He longed to let them know what men thought of him in Broad Street, and what his powers were relatively to theirs in the real things of life. To Yates the real things of life were those which

could be brought to the practical test of the open market. There was no reality, for instance, in the bars of moonlight which lay athwart the road leading up the Fiesole slope, on this evening when he was driving to Mrs. Blythe's dinner. There was no reality in the Campanile rising above Florence like the stamen of a lily; still less in the associations which clung about every foot of this upward way, delicate as the springtime scent of the grape-vine. For him they simply did not exist. His mind was not empty; but it had room for only two thoughts, two emotions — the love of money and the love of Anne Blythe.

As these did not conflict, neither crowded out the other. Rather, they seemed to intensify each other. Anne's refusal of the other day had depressed him at the time; but, as he thought it over, he concluded that it need not be considered final. He took it to mean simply that she was not ready to show her hand. He admired her the more for it.

He also regretted the precipitancy with which he had declined her offer of a loan. Yesterday he had received a letter from his partner in New York, stating that the firm had an opportunity of joining a syndicate composed of the chief financiers of the city in an underwriting scheme, which, if they could engineer it, would put them

in the front rank of the Street. This would involve an investment of four or five hundred thousand more than they had at their command. Could Yates make any arrangements on the other side? If so, profits were a sure thing, and the opening for the future might lead almost anywhere.

The letter called for an answer by cable, and Yates had made up his mind to reopen the subject with Anne when he received a note asking him to come to dinner that evening with the Hawtree Campbells, who were leaving Florence suddenly. He was not deceived by the "suddenly," and realized that he was probably an eleventh-hour substitute. Moreover, it did not suit his plans; but he was a man accustomed to grasping the skirts of unhappy as well as happy chance, and not letting go even if the gathers ripped. He was determined to make, if he could not find, an opportunity for speaking alone with Mrs. Blythe. With this in mind, he had intended to be the earliest guest, and he was dismayed, as he crossed the marble hall, to see Fleming's tall figure passing through the velvet curtains of the salon.

Luck was certainly against him, for though Mrs. Blythe greeted him graciously, she at once turned him over to the Bishop, and the Bishop

was in a talkative mood. Having filled his urn with erudition, he found it heavy and wished to pour it out on the first comer.

"I have been reading Procopius lately," he began before they were fairly seated. "A chance reference of his to Fiesole set me to studying its history with some assiduity, and every day shows me more and more how many secrets are held in the hand of this old nurse of Florence."

"No doubt," echoed Yates, indifferently, watching meanwhile the turn of Anne's shoulder against the velvet curtains.

"Yes," the Bishop went on. "Her secrets run back beyond the dawn of European civilization. I should think for a scholar there would be an immense fascination in the effort to decipher the Etruscan language."

"I'd a deal rather know Spanish," Yates announced. "What with South America and Cuba and Manila and Porto Rico, every American business man has got to have some acquaintance with Spanish; and why should he want to give up his life to learning a dialect that 's only spoken in a little place like this?"

"Etruscan," said the Bishop, leniently, "is not spoken anywhere. It is not even read or understood. It is the deadest kind of a dead language."

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"Then none of it for me," Yates responded, with some defiance in his tone. "I hate a dead language. I like things that are alive and up to date. No, sir; for my part, I'd rather do something big to-day, and let the thirtieth-century boy read about it, and astonish the school by quoting the things I used to say."

The Bishop blandly repressed a smile, and observed that it certainly would be interesting to be a great man in any age.

"Surely," said Yates. "I'd like to have been a David or Solomon, or some of those old kings of Israel." Then with a sudden recollection of the frailties of these heroes, he added: "Of course I should not wish to bow the knee to Balaam as they did."

This struck Yates as a happy quotation, especially in view of his company.

The Bishop's eye twinkled, but his voice was grave as he answered:

"Perhaps if you did, Balaam would get on better. But I must not monopolize you. There is one of Lady Campbell's daughters in the corner. Let us go to her."

Before he could shake himself free, Yates was literally cornered by the plain young lady in yellow, and could console himself only by the excellent view of Anne which his position gave

him. "She is not really handsome," he declared; "it is only the way she carries her head and her general air of owning the room and the company."

Yates was right. Anne's manner was labeled *bors concours*, like the pictures in the exhibitions, and signified that it was his own merits rather than hers which were being decided by her neighbor's estimate.

Manners are acquired, and therefore are much the same in the same grade of society the world over. Manner, on the contrary, is individual, the unconscious expression of the personality. One learns much from it if one observes carefully.

When dinner was announced, Yates saw his star brightening as he took his place on one side of his hostess. To be sure, it had not fallen to him to take her in; but that he could not expect when there were two English lords and an Italian Personage present. He could not know by intuition that Anne would not trust him too far away from her controlling hand.

Yates was a true republican and valued self-made money above inherited rank; yet he realized that *noblesse* must be obliged, and, to tell the truth, felt somewhat honored by sitting next but one to a Personage. He would have liked to join in the conversation, but being quite at sea

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as to how an Italian dignitary of that altitude should be addressed, he was obliged to turn his attention to the young lady on his other side.

Now and then Mrs. Blythe had a word or a smile for him; but they always seemed to make a closure rather than an opening of conversation. The Personage, on the other side, undoubtedly received more than his share of his hostess's attention, and repaid it with a marked devotion.

Yates's courage sank, and he found himself compelled to admit that Anne would fit well in a palace.

In his discouragement he turned with a misleading air of interest to his neighbor, a little American girl in pink.

"You have just come from Rome?"

"Yes; we have been there all winter. I love Rome, there 's so much going on. It 's like a three-ring circus. You want to watch everything at once, and you can't."

"Lots of malaria there this spring, is n't there?"

"No, I think not; that is, not in the high parts of the city; and if one is prudent—but we knew of a sad case, a man who sat next to me—I always talk to people at table d'hôte; do you?"

"Yes, except to English people: they are so patronizing; and the French and Germans and Italians I can't understand."

"Well, my friend was an American. All his life he 'd been crazy to see Rome; but he never could go because he was so prosperous."

"How American!" exclaimed Mrs. Blythe.

"Yes, was n't it? But last winter his health broke down, and the doctor ordered him abroad. His wife could n't leave the baby, so he came alone."

The little pink lady was growing as flushed as her gown in the excitement of her narrative, when, to her mortification, she discovered that Yates's eyes were fixed on the bread he was crumbling and that his attention was wandering. Anne perceived it at the same moment, and having a gift for keeping all the threads of conversation in her hands, she now leaned forward with a quick look of interest which should have abashed Yates.

"Do go on!" she exclaimed. "I should love to hear how Europe looks to a middle-aged American who sees it for the first time. Was your friend in raptures?"

"Not he!" the pink lady responded with renewed animation. "He was the most homesick man you ever saw. He shut himself up and looked at his family photographs all day, and at night he could n't sleep, so he used to get up and go to the Colosseum —"

"*Cb' era pazzo!*" murmured the Personage.

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“And what came of it?” inquired Mrs. Blythe, as if her life hung on knowing.

“Oh, it ended as you would suppose. He took the fever, and the doctor had given up hope when we left.”

Mrs. Blythe sighed, and moved her salt-cellar.

“Poor man! He should have consulted Mr. Yates before he left home. He would have been told that there is nothing outside of America worth seeing.”

Before Yates could protest, Anne’s head was turned, and her conversation with the Personage was in full career.

“It always seemed to me,” she said, “that sacrifices — little sacrifices, I mean — would be easier in Rome than anywhere else. Where people have been crucified head-downward, it seems to make less difference, don’t you know, what clothes we wear or whether people call on us.”

“I trust,” said the Personage, bending forward and dropping his voice, “that you will not think of sacrifices in connection with my city. To me it might be the most beautiful spot in the world if—”

Here his voice dropped still lower, so that Yates lost the connection. Meanwhile his other neighbor, vexed by his indifference, had turned

away, and Yates had only the coldest of cold shoulders. He was not put out by that. On the contrary, he contented himself with worrying his bread with one hand and wringing the neck of his wine-glass with the other, while he looked up and down the length of the table.

Fleming was talking with Lady Campbell, and scraps of their talk floated across to Yates. They had evidently been discussing national types of beauty, and Fleming, with praiseworthy tact, had been enlarging on the charming repose of the English.

"Repose," echoed Lady Campbell. "Yes, I grant you that, but repose may be carried too far. Our looks may win in a siege, but they do not carry by storm, as your American type does. Now there is Mrs. Blythe."

"Oh, Mrs. Blythe —"

"Yes, I know what you are going to say — that she is not a beauty at all. Perhaps not; but you should have seen her at the court ball in Rome last January. The Romans were off their heads about her."

"I am not surprised; her type is so unlike anything to which they are accustomed."

"Yes; she will make a sensation if she ever goes to Rome to live, and it begins to look as if it were quite on the cards of fate." As she spoke

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Lady Campbell glanced meaningly toward the end of the table where the Personage was leaning forward with eyes intent on Mrs. Blythe. Then she looked quickly at Fleming, and said with a little laugh: "Why don't you prevent it?"

"I never play against fate," Fleming replied calmly. "The dice are loaded, you know."

"Still —" mused Lady Campbell.

"Yes, still —" assented Fleming.

"A man may throw away his chance by being too distrustful of himself."

"Small danger of that for most of us," Fleming responded. "It has often struck me as curious that there never was a man who wished the woman whom he loved to marry a man unworthy of her; there never was a man who thought himself worthy, and yet there never was one who did not wish to marry her. Is n't it inconsistent of us?"

Lady Campbell looked rather bewildered. She never knew how to take Mr. Fleming, much as she liked him.

A few moments later Mrs. Blythe gave the rising signal.

Yates moved toward the portière and held it back for the ladies. As Mrs. Blythe passed him he leaned forward and said in a low tone:

“ May I see you alone for a few moments ? ”

“ Is it necessary ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Can't it wait ? ”

“ I 'm afraid not. The cable office closes — ”

“ Then go to the white-and-gold room at the end of the hall, and I will come when I have settled these people in the drawing-room.”

Yates followed her and strode along the hall to the reception-room, where he stood nervously turning over photographs on the onyx table and wondering if Anne would never come. At last he heard three or four heavy chords on the piano, then a light, quick step on the marble floor, and Anne stood in the doorway.

“ I can give you just five minutes,” she said, with a glance at the clock on the mantel.

“ I must be quick, then,” said Yates, trying to force a smile. “ It 's about — about that loan you offered me the other day, Anne.”

“ Yes, yes; and you have thought better of your refusal, like a sensible man. Tell me for what amount I shall draw a check, and you will get it to-morrow morning, and then you will promise me not to go to Monte Carlo again, won't you ? ”

“ It 's no question of Monte Carlo, Anne, and it 's no gambling debt, as you seem determined

to believe. It is not a loan so much as an investment. If I had an hour, instead of five minutes, I could explain it all; but as it is, I must ask you to take my word for it that it 's all right and that you shall be secured. All I ask to-night is your consent, and the money need n't be deposited until I 've had time to explain; but it 's a thundering big sum."

"How much?"

"Half a million dollars."

Anne walked to the window and stood looking out into the night.

"I was afraid you 'd take it that way," said Yates, following her. "I knew it was too much to ask."

"No, Tom, it is n't that. You don't understand. I can't pretend to lend you the money, for it 's all going to be yours when—when I marry. It will atone, won't it?"

"Good God, Anne, you don't mean it!"

Anne bowed her head. Her cheeks were scarlet.

"It 's the Italian, of course."

"It is Mr. Blair Fleming. You 'll wish me good luck, won't you, Tom, and we 'll be cousins and good friends still?"

Yates stood staring at her blankly.

Mrs. Blythe grew impatient.

"Come, Tom," she exclaimed, "the music has stopped, and I must go back; but before I go, I insist on your shaking hands with me."

She came forward with a sweet impetuosity, holding out both hands. He took them, and stooping, kissed them again and again and again. Then he dropped them and looked stonily after her as she passed out at the door.

After Anne had left him, Yates stood for a time silent and stunned, his face pale, his lips twitching. Then he made his way down the hall with no attempt at a farewell to the party in the drawing-room, took his hat from the hands of a servant at the door, and flung himself into the waiting carriage. The plunge into the silence and darkness without was grateful to his senses. He wished vaguely that the drive could last forever. He folded his arms and stared into the dim distance, yet do what he would, he could see nothing but Anne Blythe's face radiant and appealing.

He was aware of a swelling of the veins in his neck, of a dull throbbing in his head, of a load on his chest; then like a drowning man he saw the panorama of his life stretched out before him; but instead of the past, it was the future which rose and mocked him. With such a start and his financial ability, his career was assured: his

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name would travel wherever the wires flashed the news of stocks and bonds; but Anne would not care. He would have a yacht; but she would not walk its decks. He would give fine dinners; but she would never sit at the head of his table. He would reckon his fortune in seven or eight figures; but what of it? He felt that he would give it all for one kiss. Never! From now on Anne was dead to him! He began to think of her as one thinks of the dead, calling up each attitude, each trick of gesture and speech.

She had been by no means the only woman in his life; but it must be counted to him for righteousness that he saw the difference, that he had given his coarse, blundering heart to the best he had ever known.

Anne's face still haunted him. If it were to follow him like this wherever he went, he should go mad. How should he get rid of this load at his heart, with that face before him? He resolved to think of other things—the fortune. Ah, there was something solid and tangible! He would think of that. The Blythe millions his—money, power, everything he used to dream of within reach, in his very grasp. He should be a fool to let a woman spoil his life. If only he could forget the smile playing round Anne's lips on that day of their walk together when she stretched out

both hands to him and said: "Now we *are* friends!"

There was a band of iron about his head, and red globules danced before his eyes. He resolved that he would have absinthe when he reached the hotel. Absinthe could make a man forget such things; and then there were the Blythe millions. But Anne —

"To hell with the Blythe millions!"

XX

THE MOVING FINGER

“The moving finger writes, and having writ
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.”

AS the first rays of sunrise touched the gilding on the iron gate of the Villa Piacevole, a swiftly driven carriage stopped before the gate, and a messenger pulled at the bell with a haste and vigor which brought heads to all the windows.

“What ’s wanted?” Fleming’s voice called out, while Giulio was still fumbling with locks and bolts.

“Some one is ill at the Grand Hotel,” answered a voice from without. “We found a card in his pocket. Is Bishop Alston here?”

“Wait; I ’ll come down in a moment,” the Bishop responded, and lights began to glimmer along the hallway and on the staircase. All the household gathered at the door, the Bishop and

Fleming hastily buttoning their coats, and Anne in her wrapper of soft white wool.

The messenger's story was soon told. Yates, on his return to the hotel, had sat drinking absinthe in the smoking-room till he had suddenly fallen on the floor in what they thought at first was a drunken stupor; but the cut on his head had made them think of summoning a physician. The doctor, after feeling the pulse and looking at the pupils of the eyes, had shaken his head and asked if the man had friends in Florence. They had carried Yates to his room and searched his clothing, with the result of finding the Bishop's card, and at the glimmer of dawn they had sent the messenger. He had orders to bring back in the carriage any one who wished it.

"I will come, of course," the Bishop said, stepping back into the hall and reappearing with his hat and overcoat.

"I will be with you in a minute," Fleming added.

"And I shall go, too," said Anne.

"On the contrary," Fleming said, "you will go into the house, put on warmer clothing, and let Giulio bring you hot coffee at once."

"I said, I think, that I should go with you," Anne protested, with heightened color.

"But you will not."

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“Why not?”

“Because your common sense won't let you. It tells you that you could do no possible good and might do a great deal of harm, to say nothing of the risk to yourself in this chilly morning air. Remember,” he said lower :

“ ‘ If I be dear to some one else,
Then I should be to myself more dear.’ ”

You will stay here ?”

“Yes, I will stay.”

“Thank you, and pardon me if I spoke peremptorily. We 're apt to when we care so much. I shall come back at once, and if there is any need of you—if Yates asks for you or wishes to speak with you—I will take you down.”

Fleming sprang into the carriage, where the Bishop was already seated, and Anne stood looking after them as they rolled away, leaving eddies of white dust in the track of their wheels. When they were out of sight she turned slowly and entered the house. She went up-stairs and permitted her maid to dress her hair and lace her gown. Then she came down and paced up and down the hall; but the house air stifled her. She seized a long cloak, and throwing it over her shoulders, stepped out once more on the ter-

race to meet the glory of the sunrise, which seemed an insult to the grief in her heart. It was the old story :

“How can ye chaunt, ye little birds,
And I sae weary, full of care !”

For the first time Anne Blythe was profoundly moved by a sorrow not her own, and it marked an epoch in her life. But, as with most epochs, there had been a period of unconscious preparation going on in her mind. It was as Fleming fancied long ago in his walk through the rain, when he had analyzed Mrs. Blythe's character and hazarded a guess as to the influences to which she might owe its development. “A great affection,” he had said, “would do it.” A great affection *had* done it. Already she was learning to see life through the magnifying-lens of Fleming's larger nature: she was learning that desire of discipline which had been so alien to her a year ago, and she was ready to accept her share of those mutual responsibilities which bind society together.

But her interests were still profoundly personal and intensely individual. It was the thought of Tom and his suffering on her account which now knocked importunately at her heart and would not be put aside. She gave herself up

freely to the reproaches of her conscience as she recalled the scene of the night before in the white-and-gold room. She realized now with what a shock her announcement must have come upon Tom Yates. Things which vitally affect our own lives come quickly to seem part of history, and in Anne's mind her engagement to Fleming was already old, part of the calm order of things, when she confided it so lightly to Yates. Now for the first time she put herself in his place and fancied Fleming telling her in such a way of his love for another woman. "Oh, did it hurt Tom like that?" she wondered.

If Tom died now, could she ever forgive herself? She would be to blame, not for wilful cruelty, perhaps, but for a self-absorption which would not let her enter into the sufferings of another, and she had promised such a little while ago to stand by him in any trouble! She had boasted that she had it in her to be as good a friend as a man, and when it was put to the proof she had failed him like this.

She flung her trouble into the smiling face of the dawn, and with aching eyes watched the coming of day. There is a solemnity in sunrise far beyond that of sunset. The savage did well to fear the dark whence his foe might leap out

to bury the hatchet in his sleeping brain; but for us, whose perils spring from within, the danger begins with waking, and it would be fitting for us to offer up petitions to the rising sun, that while his beams shone we might be kept from folly and gluttony, from falsehood and treachery, from lust of the eye and pride of life; that we might be wise to guard against the enemy who comes in the guise of friendship, and to bare our hearts to the friend who wounds us in the name of truth; that we might go forth to meet our lives with a tender heart and a tough courage, and lay us down at night feeling that the world is no worse off for the day that we have spent in it.

How long Anne sat communing alone with her conscience in the chilly morning she could not have told. Giulio brought her coffee, and she swallowed it eagerly. Then she wheeled her chair about that she might catch the first glimpse of Fleming on his return. With the thought of him light began to dawn on her mood. She strove loyally to cling to her melancholy, but it was like a night trying to be dark when the moon had risen. His image would break through the gloom. She longed for him. She deeply desired to lay her head against his shoulder and be comforted; yet

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when he came at last she did not advance to meet him, but held herself away. It was her little reparation.

As usual, however, self-sacrifice demanded its revenges; virtue, with most of us, being like a rubber ball which if pressed upward too hard in one place is bound to sink down in another. There was a distinctly petulant note in Anne's tone as she exclaimed, questioning Fleming's face with eager eyes:

"Tell me all about him quickly, and don't look so calm! He is not going to die — say he is not!"

"No; he is in no immediate danger."

"Oh, how glad I am!" sighed Anne, with a gasp of relief; but Fleming continued:

"Perhaps, poor fellow, death would be the best thing."

Anne's face paled. The hope of atonement which had risen joyous in her heart fell back before the sadness of Fleming's tone.

"What does the doctor say?" she asked.

"He talks of 'acute primary dementia.'"

Anne tapped her slippered foot impatiently on the brick pavement.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "What do I know or care about a lot of technical words like that? Oh, why can't a man tell you the story of

what happened as a woman would, so you feel as if you 'd been there?"

"Perhaps," suggested Fleming, lightly, not suspecting the underlying causes of Anne's irritation — "perhaps because he is more hampered by the facts."

"Facts!" exclaimed Anne, scornfully. "Facts are just bones. If you wanted to see a flesh-and-blood human being, would you thank any one to show you a skeleton?"

"More than I should thank him to show me a creature of his imagination when I wished to know about the real thing."

"Well, well, never mind about that. Just begin and tell as clearly as you can from the beginning when you started in the carriage."

"I don't remember much, dear, I really don't, except that we drove very fast and that the Bishop talked most of the time about Yates."

"I am sure he said something unkind. He never liked Tom, never appreciated him, never was even fair to him."

Anne spoke resentfully, eager as we all are at times to turn into any other channel the stream of reproach which is setting too insistently inward upon ourselves.

"No," Fleming answered; "the Bishop spoke kindly enough. He said Yates was what some

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one called Pepys, 'a pollard man'; that is, that the higher aspirations had been lopped off, but that the lower faculties flourished all the more abundantly."

"I don't call that very kind. I should n't like it said of me. But never mind any more about the drive. Did you see Tom?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Did he recognize you? Did he ask for me?"

"No; he was speechless and utterly unaffected by everything going on around him."

"How did he look?"

"The impression was too painful. I would rather not dwell upon it—least of all with you," he added to himself, as he noted Anne's twitching fingers and strained voice.

"What did the doctor say of the future?"

"Nothing definite. In fact, he said he did n't know, which really gave me some confidence in him."

"Oh, yes; he was looking after his reputation, and what was our peace of mind compared with that!"

"I am afraid," Fleming answered gravely, "that there would have been very little peace of mind for Yates's friends to be had from the doctor's opinion of probabilities. He asked many questions of the Bishop and me. Some of them



" ' WE WILL BE SORRY TOGETHER. ' "



we could not answer; but when he heard that there was insanity in the family, that Yates's father and grandfather had died in an asylum, he shook his head discouragingly."

"But it came so suddenly."

"It seems so to us," Fleming answered, "but the doctor thinks that the tendency may have lurked in his system for a long while."

"But he was quite himself last night, was n't he?"

"That was one of the questions which the doctor asked. He thought that the excitement of Yates's stock-exchange life combined with his drinking habits must have laid the foundation for this—that it would have come ultimately, anyway; but he asked if we knew of any shock which would have precipitated it. Any sudden grief or terror, he said, might have accounted for it."

Anne bowed her head upon her hands, and the long-restrained tears burst out.

"Blair," she cried, "it was my fault—all mine! If he dies, I have killed him."

Fleming looked at her anxiously and moved a step nearer her; but she motioned him away.

"I told him last night that I was going to marry you—told him lightly, with no warning and with no explanation. Just because a few people were waiting for me in the drawing-room

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I went away and left him. Oh," she sobbed, "I was selfish and cruel, and now I can never tell him how sorry I am."

Fleming crossed the terrace with a determined gentleness which would not be repelled.

"My darling," he said, putting his arm close about her, "we will be sorry together."

XXI

IL PARADISINO

“One only entered in peace.”

THEY were sitting, he and she, on the steps of “Il Paradisino,” the little hermitage above Vallombrosa and the monastery, overlooking a wide stretch of Tuscan landscape. They had been married for a month, and still they found it absorbingly interesting to be alone together, from which we must infer that they were both very happy and very foolish; for if two people are really one, why should they be less dull together than when alone?

Fleming broke the silence which had fallen between them.

“Anne,” he said, “are you sure that you never regret giving up that money?”

“On the contrary, I regret it frequently.”

“Much?”

“Very much indeed!”

Fleming’s face clouded.

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“I was afraid of it,” he said.

“Now you are silly, and it pleases me to see that you can be as silly as any man when you start. I said that I regretted the money. I never said I regretted the choice between the money and you. That you know I don’t. But if you expected virtuous sentiments about the joys of poverty —”

“Poverty, Anne? I don’t call it quite that, do you?”

“Say respectable mediocrity, then, which is worse. If you wished creditable phrases turned out to order on the subject, you should have married Eunice Yates.”

“Eunice Yates!”

“Yes; there was a time when I think she would have taken you, I truly do; but that was before Stuart Walford began to make love to her.”

“When do you think that sentiment of his began?”

“Oh, more or less the first time he saw her there at the villa.”

“Then! Why, it was after that that he spoke to me about you in a way that was to be pardoned only on the ground of desperate jealousy.”

There was a touch of cynicism in Anne’s smile as she answered:

“‘He consoled himself with rhetoric.’”

“But he told me —”

“Yes, I dare say he did; but men sometimes change their minds suddenly, and when they choose they can stop a love-affair in its own length, like a train of cars.”

“Walford is a — well, never mind what he is. He has gone over to the world of shams for good.”

“Or for bad,” interpolated Anne; “but if he had married me I should have taken the rhetoric out of him, and there might have been something worth while left. He was real once.”

“I am afraid,” said Fleming, reaching out and taking Anne’s hand in his — “I am afraid that I am not enough of an altruist to wish him saved at that price; but, on the whole, he is well matched with Eunice Yates, for she, too, is a sham, a shadow, with no tactile value. It consoles me, at any rate, for the poor marriage which you are making that you might have done worse. Walford would really have been about the worst you could do. Upon my soul, I ’d rather have seen you married to Yates — yes, drinking and all.”

“Poor Tom! I might have saved him, perhaps. I shall never forgive myself — never.”

“My dear, when a man starts for the devil with a bottle of absinthe in his hand he is likely

to arrive in spite of all the female influence and that sort of thing which could be set to work tugging at his coat-tails. I don't like the last news I had of him in Newton's letter a few days ago."

"A letter from Dr. Newton? Why did n't you show it to me?"

"I could not. It was so sad, and we were so happy, I could not make it fit into our mood."

"Then George is worse?"

"He does n't say that. In fact, he says we should see little change in him, that he can sit up, and plays with the dog; but you can read between the lines that he has no hope. A man like Newton knows too much of disease ever to shut his eyes when they have been once fully opened. I never read so melancholy a letter as he writes."

"What did he say of Tom?"

"He speaks of seeing Yates and says that he was looking badly. I'm sorry for the poor fellow, but I think you idealize him a good deal. All that has come to him would have come in the end anyway. 'A man cannot escape that which is written on his forehead.'"

"I don't suppose," said Anne, "that I could make you understand the tenderness which I feel for Tom. It's partly vanity, but it's partly gratitude, too. I do think he really cared for me,

though he got me sadly mixed up with the dollars and cents, and if he had married me I should very soon have subsided into a mere episode. Money was the master passion of his life."

Anne leaned back and clasped her hands behind her head.

"Blair," she said at length, musingly, "have you any philosophy of life?"

Fleming turned and looked at her.

"You are very lovely so, with those filmy white muslin sleeves falling from your arms. They make such a good background for your face."

"Now you are trying to put me off with a compliment; but I really want to know."

"Don't you think it seems a little absurd to undertake to formulate a system of philosophy in ten minutes, and here of all places, where nature is saying, 'Stop thinking! It's poor sport. Stop and enjoy'?"

"But I don't ask you to make up a philosophy on the spot. I want to know if you've had one all these years."

"'Philosophy of life'? What do you mean by that?" Fleming asked more seriously, leaning his elbow on his knee and resting his chin on the palm of his hand.

"Satisfactory way of accounting for everything."

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“Why, no. I have no theory of how we came into this world, nor of what governs our passage through it, nor of what is to become of us when we are done with it. I long ago closed the book of the Unknowable and ceased to bother with it.”

“But you must have some practical working creed.”

“Oh, if you mean that—”

“Yes, that’s just what I do mean.”

“Well, then, I believe that, finding ourselves here, it is our clear duty to add something to the sum of human happiness.”

“Go on,” Anne said, withdrawing her hands from her head and leaning forward. “What else do you believe in?”

“I believe (this is a confession of faith, mind you, and not of practice)—I believe in hating cant and sham in our neighbors and ourselves, especially in ourselves, and in not permitting ourselves to cherish any fine sentiments which we do not work out in action. I believe in cultivating a sense of proportion, seeing large things large and small things small, doing our work squarely for the work’s sake, and merging what pride we have in the achievements of the race, which are really most creditable to us pygmies.”

“And how about heaven?”

“There again you have me. If you mean a

literal New Jerusalem, I have no views at all. If you mean heaven as another name for happiness, that 's a different matter."

"Well, take it so."

"If I were to sum up my idea of heaven in that sense, it would be a harmony of the inner and outer worlds, combined with a cheerful acceptance of our limitations."

"Oh, dear," protested Anne, "I don't believe in acceptance of our limitations at all. I approve of kicking against them as hard as we can, and climbing as well as kicking."

Fleming laughed.

"I should have said our *insurmountable* limitations," he explained; "but I remembered your accusation against the legal mind of always qualifying a truth into a truism."

Anne looked up at him sidewise out of smiling eyes.

"I don't see," she said, "that there is any need of me in your heaven."

"No need of you? You 're the whole thing. You are the harmony. '*Du bist die Rub*' — *du bist der Frieden.*' In the dull old times before I knew you I accepted my own limitations cheerfully enough — in fact, with a resignation which no one but myself could distinguish from complacency; but I was highly impatient with the

limitations of the rest of the world, out of tune with the universe, locked up in Doubting Castle, with the feeling that Giant Despair might make a meal of me any day. Then you came along and turned the key of my donjon on that blessed day at Vincigliata, and ever since I have been a free man, walking the Delectable Mountains, with Paradise in full view."

Again Fleming fell into silence. Anne opened her purse and laid a soldo on his knee.

"So that is all you think my thoughts are worth, is it?" asked her husband, with his deep-chested laugh. "Well, perhaps even so you'll get the worst of the bargain. I was thinking of a talk which we had at the club a year or more ago. Newton was there, and Yates, and then Walford came in. How it happened I don't remember, but we fell to talking of our individual ideal of Paradise. It is curious, in looking back, to see how the success and failure of each man was foreshadowed in his words that day—as if the germ of it all was in himself. It is a terrible thing, Anne, this modern idea of destiny, which makes it not some malign outside power doing spiteful things to us, but the slow inevitable working out of our own natures. It seems to be of so little consequence what we say or do, when what we *are* looms above us, driving us on to our fate."

“What were their ideals?” Anne asked, ignoring Fleming’s speculations.

“I don’t know that I could restate them exactly. Newton had some vague idea of doing great things in science and winning recognition from men whose approval meant something. Yates wanted money — nothing vague about him.”

“And Mr. Walford?”

“Influence was what he wanted — ‘influence for good,’ as he put it.”

“Dear me! so I was n’t in his Paradise, either?”

“I ignore the ‘either,’ having already refuted its implication. As for Mr. Walford, he did n’t know you then. It was just before Mr. Blythe’s funeral. Probably a month later he would have said: ‘Better Eve without Paradise than Paradise without Eve!’ I confess *I* have less sympathy with Adam than I used to have.”

“It is strange, is n’t it,” Anne mused, “that a single year should have brought each of those men the wish of his heart?”

“And yet now he has it, he is not satisfied.”

“Who is?”

“Thackeray asks the same question somewhere. I wish I had him here to show him his man. *I* am utterly, blissfully contented; and thou, belovedest?”

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Anne drew a quick, short breath.

"I am so happy," she said, "that I don't dare to think about it. I know how a great singer, must feel when his voice is in the very height of its power and he trembles when he goes on the stage lest the first sound may show a tiny flaw in its perfectness. I wish," she added slowly, looking off over the green blur of the tree-tops — "I wish that we could stay here always and need never go down into the world below."

As Anne spoke, a sudden sharp little wind sprang up and lifted the ruffles of her muslin sleeves. She shivered, and the shiver roused Fleming to the sphere of practical things.

"On the contrary," he said. "we must go down at once. The tramontana is rising, and your gown is thin. Besides, the Bishop is waiting patiently at the Croce di Savoia in the valley with that inevitable tea-basket. I confess I don't share his taste. Does n't it strike you, Anne, that tea is a rather mild beverage for a man six feet high by two feet wide? When I think how far that gentle liquid must travel before it can reach the nerves which it aims to stimulate, I wonder at its courage in starting."

"You have n't the temperament for tea, Blair. What 's the use of offering you 'the cup that cheers but not inebriates' if you will insist on be-

ing inebriated before you consent to be cheered? Well, let us go, since we must. It grows harder and harder to leave, the longer we stay in this enchanted spot."

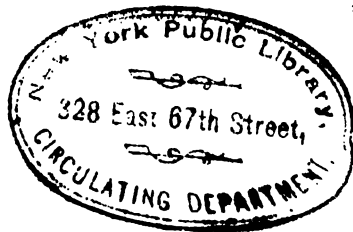
But Anne did not rise, and Fleming leaned against the doorway for some moments, looking down at her with delight in his eyes. At last he put his hand in his pocket and dropped a lira into her lap.

"You see," he said, "that my estimates are more civil than yours. Is it the Adriatic you are thinking of? Your eyes look at least as far away as that."

"I was thinking," Anne replied softly, "of the old yellow sun-dial there in our garden at the villa, and of the inscription round it:

"'L' amor che muove il sol e l' altre stelle.'

I wonder if that is not the legend over the gates of Paradise."



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